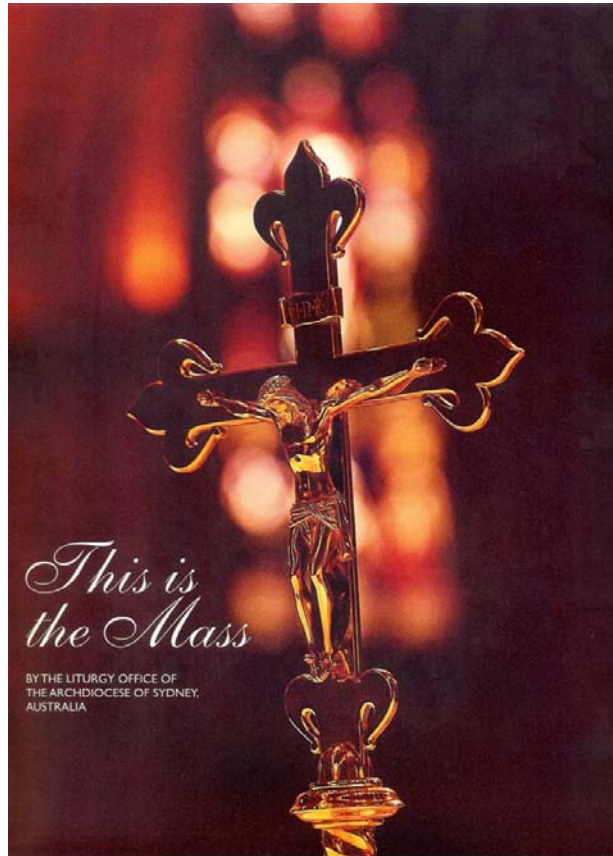


THIS IS THE MASS: Introduction



The Eucharist was instituted by Our Lord Himself at the Last Supper as a memorial to His suffering, death and resurrection. As the supreme sacrament, it continues to sustain the faithful in their struggles for goodness and faith. It is indeed the gift of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ our Savior. The celebration of the Eucharist – the Mass – is central to our lives as Catholics, so it is important that we know and learn as much about it as we can. This knowledge will help us appreciate better its beauty and depth and allow us to participate more fully in our worship of God. *This Is The Mass* is the latest and most thorough general commentary since Vatican II. Its learned and lucid text and the beauty of the photographs which accompany it open our hearts and minds to the wonder and glory of the Mass. We hope that Catholics will grow in their love of the Eucharist and their appreciation of their faith by reading and contemplating *This Is The Mass*.

+ George Cardinal Pell
Archbishop of Sydney

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Entrance Procession

*We are travelers, always on the move.
What does that mean?
That we have to keep moving forward
if we want to reach the goal.*

— Sermon 169:18



47. After the people have gathered, the Entrance chant begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. The purpose of this chant is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers.

We are a pilgrim people!¹ This image is marvelously vivid and full of movement. It expresses well the Church's existence in the here-and-now, sometimes wandering, sometimes snuggling, but always on the move.

Early Christians were hunted down for refusing to participate in the pagan worship of the Roman Empire. They met in private homes for the liturgy, coming in ones and twos from their own dwellings. When all had arrived, the bishop or priest rose to begin the liturgy, and all rose with him.

After nearly three centuries of savage persecution, the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313. It became fashionable to be Christian, and the great numbers of converts caused Constantine to hand over to the Church several "basilicas" or public halls for use as places of worship. He also conferred upon bishops the signs of respect given to the highest civic officials: an escort of attendants who carried lights and incense.

The Christians considered the honors given to the bishop as given to them all. They rose for his entrance, not only to show their respect, but also to express their unity and common dignity.

The Entrance Procession today is not an archaic formality or even a practical matter of bringing the priest and ministers to the altar. It is much more than that. It is a sign of the journey of the pilgrim Church on earth towards the heavenly Jerusalem. The procession moves in stately progress toward the altar, the "high place" where God awaits His people: *Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.*²

It is no unruly crowd that enters, but a liturgical assembly. The order of the procession reflects the ordered composition of the Church, because the assembly is *a royal priesthood, a holy nation*,³ and so it is hierarchically structured. Incense signals the dignity of those who are led by the cross with the image of Christ, because the Church follows Christ Who enters our midst. The cross is flanked by candles, just as ancient rulers were honored by attendants bearing lights and incense.

Then come others, arranged in their proper rank. Some can see this as 'least to greatest' since the principal celebrant is last. Others, however, can view this as 'greatest to least', since *the one who is greatest must be servant of all*.⁴

We come to Mass both as individuals and as an assembly. Together we come into God's presence; in His sight all are important, all are His children. Some of the people we may know well, others may be known only in passing, or not at all. But in the movement of the procession and the standing of the assembly, together we become a people - a pilgrim people, a people on the move.

Together we will pray, listen, sing. Together we will share the one Bread and the one Cup. Together we will join in the one saving action of Christ which began at the Last Supper and continues on through the centuries as a surging wave of redemption, each Mass like a wave on the ocean of salvation history.

Our task is to find our place in the enormous whole.

- 1 (Chapter VII, Lumen Gentium, The Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council)
- 2 Psalm 122:1,4
- 3 1 Peter 2:9
- 4 Matthew 20:16,26

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: Entrance Song

*Singing comes out of happiness,
and, if you look closer, out of love.
So one who knows how to appreciate the "new life"
also knows how to sing a "new song."*

-- Sermon 34:1



39. The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (cf. Col 3:16). Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2:46). Thus St Augustine says rightly, 'Singing is for one who loves.' There is also the ancient proverb: 'One who sings well prays twice.'

40. Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly.

The people of Israel were especially fond of music. Genesis tells us that Jubal was the traditional inventor of musical instruments;⁵ hence our words 'jubilee' and 'jubilation'.

There could have been no people more jubilant than those who narrowly escaped slavery in Egypt by racing across the miraculously opened bed of the Red Sea. Miriam, the sister of Moses, took up a tambourine and led the people in a breathless but triumphant song of praise to God their Savior.⁶

The psalms of the shepherd-king David became the staple of the hundreds of singers and instrumentalists in Solomon's Temple who led the people in song every day. Jesus and His apostles themselves sang these psalms: *And singing a psalm, they went to the Mount of Olives.*⁷ Among the last words of Christ on the cross were the opening lines of Psalm 22: *"My God, my God, why have You abandoned Me?"*

Like the Israelite tribes of old, we sing as the Entrance Procession makes its way through the parted assembly, from the door of the church to the altar: *Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise!*⁸

Even in their first gatherings in homes, the early Christians sang, as St Paul testifies.⁹ When the Roman persecutions ended and Christians were allowed to worship publicly, their liturgy became a splendid affair and choirs were formed to lead the people's singing, and to perform specialized songs on their own. Members of the *schola cantorum* or choir, standing in two double rows at the entrance to the sanctuary, would sing alternating verses of a psalm while the people joined in short antiphon or refrain.

Singing unites the assembly, and makes the procession an event in which all can share. Silence at this point is unnatural, because it focuses everyone's attention on those who are walking. Singing allows everyone to participate in the action, to be caught up in the spirit of the celebration that is beginning.

The assembly does not stand to welcome the priest celebrant, but stands to welcome Christ Himself. He is present in the person of the priest, and He is present in the gathered assembly of the faithful. At that moment, singing together as the procession moves through our midst, we individuals form ourselves as a unit, *a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart*¹⁰ on its pilgrim way to the heavenly Jerusalem. Each one of us says with the psalmist, *"I will go to the altar of God, the God of my joy."*¹¹

- 5 Genesis 4:21
- 6 Exodus 15:1-21
- 7 Mark 14:26
- 8 Psalm 100:4
- 9 Colossians 3:16
- 10 1 Peter 2:9
- 11 Psalm 43:4



THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **Showing Reverence**

*When people bend the knee or stretch out their hands,
or even bow themselves down in prayer,
they are using their bodies to show their inner spirit of prayer.
God knows our unseen desire and our heart's intention,
and He does not need these signs that we are praying to Him;
but we need them, because they help us pray
more humbly and more fervently.*

On the Trinity: 7



The Israelites knew God as a Father, and often spoke to Him with startling familiarity. But they were also conscious of another relationship: "*A mighty God is the Lord, a great King above all gods ... He is our God, and we the people who belong to His pasture, the flock that is led by his hand*".¹² Their relationship to God as King, Lord and Creator led them to cry out: "*Come in, let us bow and bend low, let us kneel before the God Who made us!*"¹³

Great figures of the Bible are found showing reverence in God's presence. Moses removed his sandals before God's presence in the Burning Bush, David prostrated himself on the ground before the Ark of the Covenant, Elijah veiled his face with his cloak when the Divine Presence was revealed to him. Jesus Himself, praying to His Father in the garden before His arrest, knelt to pray.

St Paul imitated His Master: "*I fall on my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.*"¹⁴ And he proclaimed that "*at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and even under the earth.*"¹⁵

Good parents want their children's love, but also their respect. Our reverence toward God, and toward the things of God, expresses our respect and our adoration. We need to adore God and to reverence Him, for the good of our souls.

When coming into the immediate presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Catholics genuflect to salute and worship the Lord Jesus. Approaching the altar, they bow in reverence to the place of Sacrifice and the table of Communion. During the Eucharistic Prayer and again in the preparation for holy Communion, they kneel to offer that special form of praise that is adoration. On Good Friday, and in ordinations and religious professions, people humbly prostrate themselves on the floor. Our bodies outwardly express our inner attitudes of prayer.

The Revelation of St John portrays the twenty-four elders in heaven who represent all creation in adoration before God. When we adore God, when we show Him reverence with our bodies, at that moment we are there for God, and for God alone.

We cannot see God, because everything here is still in the obscurity of time, still earthly. But we know by faith that He is present in the sacred liturgy. He is God, and we are His creatures. He made us, and we have our very existence in Him.

An ancient Christian prayer says it well: *It is before You, O eternal Father, through Your only begotten Son, that we bend the knee... Give us your hand, O Master, and lift us up. Raise us, O God of mercies! Let our gaze be lifted towards You, let our eyes be opened!*¹⁶

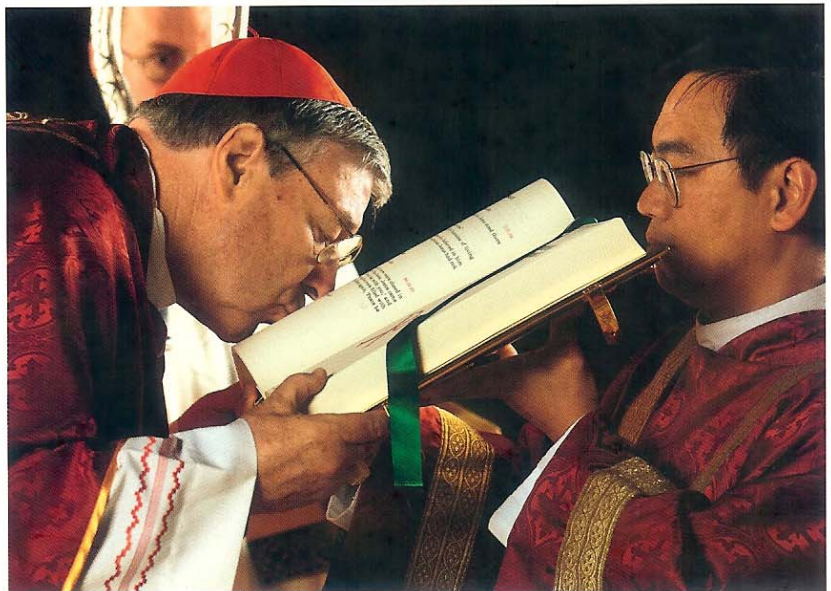
13 Psalm 95:6

14 Ephesians 3:14-15

15 Philippians 2:10

16 Euchology, Prayer at the Genuflection

42. The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered. Therefore, attention should be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice.



THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **Kissing the Altar**

*Christ and His Church persevered
through a multitude of martyrs.
This Church, this inheritance of God,
has been gathered together out of the nations
by means of the Stone which the builders rejected,
which has become the Cornerstone.*

-- On Psalm 79:3



49. When they reach the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the ministers reverence the altar with a profound bow. As an expression of veneration, moreover, the priest and deacon then kiss the altar itself; as the occasion suggests, the priest also incenses the cross and the altar.
302. The practice of placing relics of Saints, even those not Martyrs, under the altar ... is fittingly retained.

There is scarcely any element that is so firmly located in the realm of the senses as a kiss exchanged between persons, and even from person to thing. A kiss that comes from love or respect is a gesture of great significance. When the priest kisses the altar at the beginning and end of Mass, he is kissing 'the next best thing' - Christ is not present on the altar in His Body and Blood at this point, but He will be (or He has been), and therefore that altar is precious.

It is the holy place of sacrifice, the table of the Lord's Supper, the cornerstone of our existence as His People. Approaching it, the priest is moved to bend down and kiss it. In doing so, he salutes Christ on our behalf. He does more - he shows our love for Christ.

The altar is the frontier, the border where God comes to us and we go to Him in a most special way. ¹⁷ It is the table to which God our Father invites us. Through Baptism we have become His sons and daughters, and so His house is ours. At the altar we enjoy the intimate community of His sacred table, and a profound mystery of divine-human love is realized. ¹⁸

The altar represents Christ the Cornerstone ¹⁹ that is living. ²⁰ St Paul, referring to the rock which gushed forth water for the Israelites in the desert, says that "*the Rock was Christ.*" ²¹ This is why the altar - at least its *mensa* or top, if not the entire structure - is ideally made of solid stone.

The altar is a tomb - but not Christ's. Rather, it has been a praiseworthy tradition to enclose the relics of saints within or beneath the altar. St Ambrose says: "*Let the triumphant victims take their place where Christ is the Victim. He who suffered for all is above the altar; those redeemed by His sufferings are beneath the altar.*"

²² Indeed, Scripture itself alludes to the early Christian practice of celebrating the Eucharist upon the sarcophagus of a martyr on the anniversary of his or her death: "*When the fifth seal was broken, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.*" ²³

Thus the presence of the relics of saints serves to verify the scriptural reminder that when we celebrate the liturgy, "*we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses*" ²⁴ and bears witness to the sacrifice which those before us have made for Christ.

Finally, since the Eucharist is at the centre of the Church's worship, it is only fitting that the altar is central to the place where the Church gathers. It is the focus of liturgical spirituality for all our sacramental rites when Christians come before it to pray, to prostrate, to promise, to commit. It is around the altar that we gather, so that it becomes the sign of what we ourselves are: *"What is the altar of Christ, if not the form of the body of Christ?"* ²⁵

The altar is of such importance that it is consecrated with rites that parallel Baptism. Like the Christian, the altar is washed, anointed, enlightened with fire and clothed in a white garment. It is a powerful sign of the Church's unity: *"There is one bishop, one altar, one sacrifice."* ²⁶

Kissing the altar, a simple table is not being saluted. Rather, we are expressing our love for the Church that exists both in heaven and on earth, and for Christ Who is the Cornerstone of that Church.

17 Bernhard Kleinheyer, *The Meaning of the Sacramental Symbols*, p 139

18 cf Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 53-57

19 cf 1 Peter 2:7, Ephesians 2:20

20 cf 1 Peter 2:4

21 1 Corinthians 10:4

22 St Ambrose, *Letter* 22:13

23 Revelation 6:9

24 Hebrews 11:1

25 Ambrose, *On The Sacraments*, 5, 2, 7

26 St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians*, 4

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **The Sign of the Cross**

*Of what use is it to make the Sign of the Cross upon your body
if the Sign of the Cross is not upon your heart?
God does not want us to simply make pictures of His signs,
but to act upon them.*

- On Psalm 50:1



50. When the Entrance chant is concluded, the priest stands at the chair and, together with the whole gathering, makes the Sign of the Cross.

Catholic parents - even those who do not regularly practise the Faith - find themselves holding the right hand of their infant child and guiding him or her to make the Sign of the Cross.

The words of this most Catholic of gestures come to us from Christ Himself: *"Go, therefore, make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* ²⁷

As early as the 2nd century, Christians were signing themselves with the Cross, making a small cross upon their foreheads with their thumb or finger. St Hippolytus of Rome says: *"This Sign shows forth the Passion which opposes the devil, if you make it with faith, not to please others, but knowing how to use it as a breastplate... This is what Moses represented through the Passover lamb which was sacrificed, when he sprinkled the thresholds and smeared the doorposts with its blood."* ²⁸

St Jerome also refers to the Exodus event when he reminds his disciples: *"Keep the door of your heart shut, and frequently defend your forehead with the Sign of the Cross, lest the exterminator of Egypt (Satan) find some unguarded spot in you."* ²⁹

This small Sign on the forehead is still seen today in the liturgies of Baptism, Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick, and in the imposition of ashes. But by the 4th century it had become the large Sign from forehead to chest and from shoulder to shoulder. It was also being used at many points within the liturgy.

Official persecutions had ended in the early 4th century, but there were now many religious arguments between various groups of Christians, and between Christians and unbelievers. St Cyril of Jerusalem gave this advice: *"When you are about to dispute with unbelievers... first make with your right hand the Sign (of the Cross), and your opponent will be speechless. Do not be ashamed to confess the Cross."* ³⁰

And the great St Athanasius, who defended the Church's teaching about the Trinity, rings out: *"By the Sign of the Cross all magic ceases, all spells are powerless, every idol is abandoned and deserted... and the person on earth gazes into heaven."* ³¹

Making the Sign of the Cross, we profess faith in Blessed Trinity, the one God existing as a community of divine Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we cross ourselves, then, it should not be a small cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning.

A large unhurried Sign can better include the whole of us - our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us at once - consecrating and sanctifying us. It does so because it is the Sign of our redemption. Indeed it is the holiest of all our religious gestures. We begin and end all of our prayers with it; and the Mass, being the greatest prayer of all, fittingly begins and concludes with it. Through this Sign the whole liturgy is strengthened with Christ's strength, and consecrated in the name of the Triune God.³²

27 Matthew 28:19

28 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 36

29 St Jerome, Letter 130:9

30 St Cyril of Jerusalem, Cathetical Instructions, 13:22

31 St Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word, no 1

32 cf Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, pp 13-14

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **The Greeting**



50. Then (the priest) signifies the presence of the Lord to the community gathered there by means of the Greeting. By this greeting and the people's response, the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest. After the greeting of the people, the priest, the deacon, or a lay minister may very briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day.

A simple love story in the Bible has given us one of our most familiar lines in the liturgy. It is the story of the young widow Ruth, a pagan girl who chose to remain with her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi in Bethlehem rather than return to her own country.

Ruth went to work in the field of Naomi's kinsman Boaz, gleaning the wheat left over by the reapers. One day, while inspecting the work being done, he greeted the reapers: "*The Lord be with you.*" ³³ Then, spying the new young woman there, he asked who she was; the rest is biblical history.

The priest's greeting and the people's response at the beginning of Mass is not intended to be a simple social exchange. While the priest is free to welcome people to the celebration and introduce the reason for the liturgical gathering, these words come only after the liturgical greeting.

"The Lord be with you" is not a social greeting, but a spiritual one. It is the celebrant's expressed wish that God will animate the people who have gathered to offer Him thanks and praise in Christ and the Holy Spirit. The people's response, *"And with your spirit,"* also comes from Scripture, used by St Paul in his Epistles:

"Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" ³⁴ ... *"The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you."* ³⁵...

When the people respond to the priest, they are expressing the wish that he will lead their worship in the power of the Spirit that he received at ordination, as St Paul described it to his disciple St Timothy: *"Stir up into a flame the gift of God that you received through the laying on of my hands, for God has not given us a cowardly spirit, but one that is strong, loving and wise"* ³⁶

The greeting which a bishop uses at Mass repeats the words that the Risen Christ used when He appeared to His disciples gathered in the Upper Room: *"Peace be with you."* ³⁷ The bishop is the primary celebrant of the liturgy in his diocese, with the priests acting as his helpers and delegates. ³⁸ Therefore this Easter greeting of peace is reserved to the bishop.

There are other liturgical greetings that are used, also having their origin in the New Testament and used in ancient liturgies: ³⁹ *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* ⁴⁰ and *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* ⁴¹ These words, spoken at the very start of the Mass, lead us out of our everyday world and into the timelessness that is of the very essence of the liturgy. For when we celebrate the Eucharist, we enter the eternal moment of the Father's love for us, the Son's redeeming act accomplished in the Holy Spirit.

33 Ruth 2:4

34 Galatians 6:18, Philemon 25

35 2 Timothy 4:22

36 2 Timothy 1:6-7

37 John 20:19, 21

38 cf GIRM 92: Every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is directed by the Bishop, either in person or through priests who are his helpers. Cf also no. 42, Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy

39 such as the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, second half of the 3rd c
40 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2,
Philippians 1:2, Collosians 1:2, Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2,
Philemon 1:3
41 2 Corinthians 13:14

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water

*The word of faith possesses such power in the Church of God,
that when the priest presents us with water which he blesses and sprinkles,
he purifies even the tiny infant.
This is done by means of God's Word, for the Lord says:
"Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you."*

- On John's Gospel 80:3



51. On Sundays, especially in the Season of Easter, in place of the customary Act of Penitence, from time to time the Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water to recall Baptism may take place.

Water is a mysterious thing, on the one hand smooth and transparent, so "modest" as St Francis calls it, as if it hardly existed in its own right. It is a humble servant, washing away dirt and satisfying thirst. On the other hand, water is a restless, foundationless, enigmatic force that can draw us into destruction. It is an apt image for this life of ours that looks so clear and yet is so inexplicable.

The Church uses water as the sign and the bearer of the divine life of grace. Christians emerge from the waters of Baptism into a new life, born again of water and the Holy Spirit. In those same waters the old individual was destroyed and put to death. By her consecration of it, the Church has freed water from the dark powers that sleep in it. She blesses it and asks God to make of it a vehicle of His grace.

Christians, when they enter the church, moisten forehead, breast and shoulders - all their person - with the clean and cleansing water in order to cleanse their souls.⁴² In this rite, a connection is made between Eucharist, Cross and Baptism. On Sunday, which is 'a little Easter', it is especially appropriate to recall this connection; as the rite reminds us, *"This water will be used to recall our Baptism."*

The sprinkling rite continues a spiritual tradition that is not uniquely Christian, having originated with the Jews. Sticklers for cleanliness ever since their long sojourn in the desert, they always washed head, hands and feet before praying at home or in the synagogue. Whenever they went to the Temple in Jerusalem, they stripped down and bathed in a ritual bath called a *mikvah* before donning special clothing for worship and entering the Temple precincts.

Temple worship included ritual sprinklings with 'lustral water', that is, water into which were mixed the ashes of a sacrificed red heifer. The psalmist recalls this when he prays, *"You will sprinkle me, O Lord, using a branch of hissop, and I shall be cleansed; You will wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow."*⁴³

Early Christian house-churches used the atrium, an entry courtyard equipped with a pool to catch rain water, not only for baptisms, but also for regular ritual purification. When Christianity was legalized and basilicas were taken over for use as churches, entry courtyards were added which included pools or fountains. St Peter's and other older basilicas of Rome still have fountains or pools in their *atria*.

As time went on, churches continued to locate the baptismal font near the entry, and to this day we find holy water fonts or 'stoops' at church doors, keeping ritual purification in the Church's consciousness.

While the Act of Penitence is a purification of sorts, it is a verbal one. But Catholic liturgy is not simply verbal, but is rich in symbol and gesture. Thus the Sprinkling Rite, when it is used, replaces the spoken Act of Penitence. This denotes a penitential spirit, a preparation for the Eucharistic celebration, and a remembrance of Baptism; for as Baptism wipes out all guilt, so also this sprinkling should remind us of our failings, and be for us a sign of conversion.

42 cf Romano Guardini, *op cit*, pp 45-48

43 Psalm 51:7

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Confiteor (Confessing our sinfulness)



The priest invites those present to take part in the Act of Penitence, which, after a brief pause for silence, the entire community carries out through a formula of general confession. This rite concludes with the priest's absolution, which, however, lacks the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance.

There are three forms of the Act of Penitence; the first is the *Confiteor* or "I confess".

This communal confession of our unworthiness is most effective when preceded by a pause for silence sufficient to allow everyone, priest and people, to recall their sins. Otherwise, it runs the risk of being simply a recited formula without much substance.

Silence is an important part of prayer in general, and of the prayer of sorrow in particular: *Sacred silence, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. Its purpose, however, depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus within the Act of Penitence, all recollect themselves.* ⁴⁴

A pause at this point assists the assembly in making a brief examination of conscience. Our worship of the all-holy God requires that we do our best to approach the sacred mysteries in holiness and purity of heart: *"To prove my innocence I wash my hands and take my place around Your altar ... Do not sweep me away with sinners ... As for me, I walk the path of perfection. Redeem me and show me Your mercy. My foot stands on level ground: I will bless the Lord in the assembly."* ⁴⁵ Again, we read in Scripture: *"My sacrifice is a contrite spirit; a humbled, contrite heart You will not spurn ... Then You will be pleased with lawful sacrifice."* ⁴⁶

In the *Confiteor* priest and people confess their sins. This public confession is addressed primarily to God and to each other; but it is also addressed to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, to the angels and to all the saints. "The saints" means not only the great historical figures of sanctity, but all the saved, all who have gone home to God, all who already participate in eternal life. ⁴⁷ Thus the Church in heaven prayerfully assists the Church on earth as it continues on its pilgrimage.

Saying the words, *"through my fault ... "* we strike our breast, making a gesture that is both liturgical and scriptural. It is found in the example of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the Temple: *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* ⁴⁸ And when Jesus died on the cross, St Luke recounts that the crowd of spectators returned to their homes, *beating their breasts.* ⁴⁹ Since the

Jews understood the heart to be the source and seat of sin, striking the breast could be understood as a visible expression of a genuine consciousness of sin.

The early Church teaches us: *God gives hope to those who have sinned that, when they repent, they will find salvation in their repentance. Let them not despair, let them not abide in their sins, let them not increase them! ... Let them be converted with their whole heart.* ⁵⁰

44 GIRM no 45

45 Psalm 26

46 Psalm 51

47 cf Romano Guardini, *Sacred Symbols* 134

48 Luke 18:13; cf also 23:48

49 Luke 23:48

50 Didascalia 6:81

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Kyrie (Praising Christ's mercy)

*I implore You, my God,
to Whom faith calls us,
hope leads us,
and love unites us:
come to me in Your mercy!*

- Soliloquies 1:3



52. After the Act of Penitence, the Kyrie is always begun, unless it has already been included as part of the Act of Penitence. Since it is a chant by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy, it is ordinarily done by all, that is, by the people and the choir or cantor having a part in it. . . . When the Kyrie is sung as a part of the Act of Penitence, a trope may precede each acclamation.

In the courtyard of the High Priest, St Peter had publicly denied even knowing Jesus of Nazareth. So it must have been a stirring moment when Peter stood before a huge crowd of Jews some fifty days later to proclaim his faith in this same Jesus: *"Let the whole House of Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* ... *Then those who gladly received his word were baptised; some three thousand souls were added to their number that day.* ⁵¹

The *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy) that is sung or said at Mass is addressed to Jesus as "both Lord and Christ." It is not Trinitarian (addressed to Father, Son and Spirit) but Christological - it is praise given to Jesus.

Nor is it penitential in nature. Rather, it is the logical conclusion of our realisation that, despite our unworthiness, Christ invites us to join Him in offering worship to His Father in the Holy Spirit. Truly, *"His great love is without end ... His mercy endures for ever."* ⁵²

This is not a begging for forgiveness, but a praise of God's love. This is the kind of "mercy" implied by the Greek word *eleison*: "show us Your love."

The second form of the Act of Penitence combines the best elements of the *Confiteor* and the *Kyrie*:

V. *Lord, we have sinned against You; Lord, have mercy.*

R. *Lord, have mercy.*

V. *Lord, show us Your mercy and love.*

R. *And grant us Your salvation.*

The third form of the Act of Penitence includes "tropes" or short invocations which are not self-accusatory statements, but acclamations of praise, such as:

You are mighty God and Prince of peace ... You came to gather the nations into the peace of God's kingdom ... You feed us with Your Body and Blood ... and so on.

In the early Church, deacons sang a litany of invocations or petitions, with the assembly responding: *"To all these petitions which the deacon announces, let the people, especially the children, reply, Kyrie, eleison."* ⁵³

Over the centuries, the litany was abbreviated, with only the *Kyrie* response remaining. This became the rule for centuries. Then a preoccupation with the symbolism of numbers led to a tripling of the *Kyrie*. Various medieval threats such as barbarian invasions, the millennium and the Black Death led people to focus on their sinfulness. Thus the *Kyrie* took on a penitential nature, addressed to the Trinity rather than to Christ alone.

Now we have returned to the original theme of this short litany, acclaiming Jesus for His mercy, and confessing that "*Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" ⁵⁴

51 Acts of the Apostles 2:36, 41

52 cf Psalm 118:1-3

53 The Apostolic Constitutions, 161

54 Philippians 2:11

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Gloria (Giving glory to God)

Those who seek the Lord shall praise Him.

-Confessions 1:1



53. The Gloria is a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other text. It is sung or said on Sundays outside the Seasons of Advent and Lent, on Solemnities and Feasts, and at special celebrations of a more solemn character.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of goodwill.'" ⁵⁵

Due to its opening line coming from the Gospel account of the angels' announcement to the shepherds in Bethlehem, the *Gloria* is sometimes called The Angelic Hymn. Because it offers praise to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, it is also called the Greater Doxology (compared to the 'Glory be' which is the Lesser Doxology).

By any name, the *Gloria* is one of the greatest hymns produced by Christian poets, and it has been set to music by many composers throughout history. Its prose text is extremely ancient, modeled after the psalms and hymns of the Bible and found in early Syrian and Greek liturgies: *The bishop then addresses the people in these words: "Holy things to the holy." The people are to reply: "One single Holy One, one single Lord, Jesus Christ, Who is blessed forever, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. Glory to God in the highest heaven, on earth peace, among men God's good will."*⁵⁶

About the year 500 it was included in the pope's Midnight Mass at Christmas, and for several centuries was reserved for the exclusive use of the bishop of Rome. Then priests were permitted to use it, but only at the Easter Vigil and on the anniversary of their ordination. Finally, around the 11th or 12th century, its use was extended to all Sunday and feast day Masses outside Advent and Lent, a practice which continues today.

In the Book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse of what the redeemed in heaven are doing: *"They do not rest day or night, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'"*⁵⁷ In the Mass, heaven and earth meet and we join in the song of praise which the blessed are continually offering to the Triune God.

Is this eternal praise of God boring? No, because it is offered by souls in love with God. Those who are in love here on earth do not use stop watches to time their embraces and kisses, nor do lovers time their conversations. Caught up in love, time is of no importance. In heaven, time does not even exist, and everyone finds joy in giving glory and praise to God.

People in love see the good in one another; they compliment and praise one another. We who experience the loving mercy and purifying power of God in the Act of Penitence or Sprinkling Rite find joy in singing the Angelic Hymn, this Greater Doxology.

"Doxology" is Greek for 'words of praise'. In the Greater Doxology we lay aside ourselves and all our interests and glorify the Lord for His own sake, for His power and His glory,⁵⁸ confident that He Who is holy will hear our prayer.



55 Luke 2:13-14

56 The Apostolic Constitutions, 179 – 8:13, 10 - 17

57 Revelation 4:8

58 Nicholas Cabasilas, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, 12

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **The Collect**

54. Next the priest invites the people to pray. All, together with the priest, observe a brief silence so that they may be conscious of the fact that they are in God's presence and may formulate their petitions in their hearts and minds. Then the priest says the prayer which is customarily known as the Collect and through which the character of the celebration is expressed. In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, the Collect prayer is usually addressed to God the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and is concluded with a Trinitarian ending.



The priest gives a terse invitation: Let us pray, and we enter into another brief but important moment of silence in the Mass. Unlike the beginning of the Act of Penitence when we recall our sinfulness, this silence invites us to bring to mind our personal needs and those of others. *It is important that our life include times, our day moments of stillness in which we collect ourselves and lay out before our heart the problems which have stirred us during the day. In a word, we must learn again to meditate and to pray.* ⁵⁹

Intercessory prayer, petitioning God on behalf of others, is as old as the Bible itself. Abraham persisted in asking God to spare the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses interceded for the Israelites, who were sometimes in true need but at other times in trouble of their own making. Esther prayed for her fellow Jews to be delivered from their enemies. The examples multiply as one reads the Old Testament.

In the Gospel, Jesus encourages us to pray for our own needs: *“Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive them, and you will have them.”*⁶⁰ ... *So I say to you; ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”*⁶¹ And He responded to many requests for help; the ten lepers, the woman with a hemorrhage, the two blind men, and others.⁶²

In His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, He speaks of praying for others.⁶³ He often responded to the petitions people made on behalf of others: the centurion for his servant, Martha and Mary for their brother, Jairus for his daughter, the father for his possessed son, and friends bringing to Him a paralysed man.⁶⁴ St Paul prayed for others and encouraged Christians to do the same.⁶⁵

After we have prayed in silence, the priest prays on behalf of the assembly, gathering everyone's intentions into one prayer, the Collect. There are usually four parts to this prayer: an invocation of God the Father, the recalling of some deed God has done, the petition of the Church, and the concluding request for the mediation of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The original Latin collects are jewels of prose composition, notable for their clarity, restraint, style and above all for their doctrinal content. At first hearing or reading, the Collect may seem overly formal and didactic, very unlike the informal and exuberant but lengthy prayers of evangelical Christians.

But as one grows familiar with the restraint that is characteristic of the Roman liturgy, it becomes obvious that the clear-cut, lucidly constructed phrases are full of interior enlightenment. The liturgy as a whole is not favourable to exuberance of feeling. Emotion glows at its depths, but it merely smoulders, like the fiery heart of the volcano whose summit stands out clear and serene against the sky. We are made particularly aware of this at holy Mass ... amongst its prayers are to be found masterpieces of spiritual restraint. The restraint characteristic of the liturgy is at times very pronounced, making this form of prayer appear at first as a frigid intellectual production, until we gradually grow familiar with it and realise what vitality pulsates in the clear, measured forms.⁶⁶

Almighty God says, "Ask what you will," and you might ask for the whole earth, the sea, the air, the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars. They are all beautiful, but they are made by God. Ask for God Himself, and you will have God — Beauty in Itself — and in Him you will possess everything He has made.

- On Psalm 34:1, 12

59 cf Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility*, pp 92-104

60 Mark 11:24

61 Luke 11:9

62 Luke 17:12-19; Mark 5: 25-34; Matthew 9: 27-31

63 Luke 16:27-28

64 Luke 7:1-10, John 11:1-45, Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Luke 9:38-42; Matthew 9:1-8

65 Romans 1:9; 15:30-32; 2 Corinthians 9:14; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:1-4, et al

66 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, no 554

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD: The First Reading

When I was young, I tried to listen to the Scriptures with all the refinement of an intellectual, but without the humility of a true searcher. I was supposed to be knocking at the door so that it would open for me. Instead, I was pushing it closed, trying to understand in pride what is only learned in humility.

- Sermon 51:6



57. In the readings, the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, it is preferable to maintain the arrangement of the biblical readings, by which light is shed on the unity of both Testaments and of salvation history. Moreover, it is unlawful to substitute other, non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God.

The reading of the Gospel is the highlight of the Liturgy of the Word. The reading of the other parts of the New Testament - the Epistles or Letters to the Church, the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation - are also a part of our heritage. But sometimes people wonder why we read from the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures.

If we are not familiar with the entire context of a passage from the Old Testament, it may be difficult to understand. The prayer of Daniel, for example, doesn't have quite the impact if we don't realise that Daniel is praying whilst alone in the lion's den.

Following ancient tradition, the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays usually begins with a reading from the Old Testament: *Let the reader stand upon some high place. Let him read the books of Moses, of Joshua the son of Nun, of the Judges, and of the Kings and of the Chronicles, and of those written after the Captivity; and, besides these, the books of Job and of Solomon, and of the sixteen prophets.*

⁶⁷ St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) explained this custom in a nutshell: *"In the Old Testament, the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old Testament is revealed."* ⁶⁸

Before the Second Vatican Council, there were only two readings on Sundays; the Epistle and the Gospel. Then the Council mandated a change: *"The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years."* ⁶⁹

Thus the Liturgy of the Word includes three readings plus a responsorial psalm. In fact, if one were to attend Mass every Sunday and weekday for the course of a three-year cycle, one would hear most of the Bible proclaimed.

But the Church is a wise teacher and does not simply read the Bible from start to finish. For the Bible is not a one-volume work, but a collection of 73 books of different literary genres or types: history, allegory, poetry, prophecy, and so on. Thus there is a special arrangement of the readings at Mass. The First Reading (usually from the Old Testament, except during Eastertide, when it is from the

Acts of the Apostles) is carefully chosen to introduce us to the Gospel of the day; it is "harmonised" with the Gospel.

For example, on Sunday 3 of Lent (Year C of the three-year cycle), the First Reading is about God revealing Himself to Abraham. The Gospel portrays God revealing Jesus to Peter, James and John as His beloved Son in the Transfiguration. The connection is God's revelation of Himself to us.

Similarly, on Sunday 4 of Lent (Year C), the Gospel describes the woman at the well, and Jesus offering her the water of everlasting life. The First Reading, then, is God's answer to the prayer of Moses, giving water from a rock to the Israelites in the desert. The theme is God's spiritual water that refreshes us.

Preparing for Mass by reading the Scriptures in advance will help us open our hearts to God's word, which is light and life for our souls.

67 The Apostolic Constitutions, 2:57

68 St Augustine, On Catechising the Unlearned, 4:2

69 no.51, Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

LITURGY OF THE WORD: **Responsorial Psalm**

*Dear friends, sing the Psalm with human reason, not like parrots.
They are often taught to say what they do not understand,
but we can know what we are saying, by God's grace.
So we who have learnt to sing about God's works
should be eager to do so, singing together with one voice.*

- On Psalm 18:2



War and peace, love and hate, intrigue and innocence, comedy and tragedy, history and morality, damnation and salvation - all of these are, on one Sunday or another, themes of the First Reading in the Liturgy of the Word.

So many different lessons require a similar variety of responses. That is why the Psalter - the collection of the 150 Hebrew psalms - is an ideal source of prayer material for the Church when she responds to the First Reading. The Responsorial Psalm allows us to express human feelings, longings and reactions that link us to fellow pilgrims down through the centuries.

In ancient Judaism, the singing of the psalms was originally restricted to Temple events; but by the time of Jesus, psalm singing had found a place in the synagogue service as well. Jesus and His family and friends would have known many, if not all, of the psalms by heart. They would have sung them at work and at home, on the way to and from Jerusalem at festival time, and at the key moments of birth, bar mitzvah, marriage and death. The psalms were true prayers for the people.

The psalms are prayers for Christians as well, and they speak to the changing needs of our lives in Christ. There are psalms of despair that turns into hope, psalms of complaint that grows into trust, psalms of fear that settles into peace. Every human emotion, every human experience can be found in the psalms. *"We need only to read the psalms to see humanity as it really is. There the soul is shown as courageous and despondent, happy and sorrowful; full of noble intentions, but of sin and struggles as well, zealous for everything that is good; and then again apathetic and dejected."*⁷⁰

At Mass we usually pray the psalm 'responsorially' - that is, a cantor or reader proclaims the verses, and we respond with a refrain. In the Liturgy of the Hours we usually pray the psalm 'antiphonally' - meaning one side or group sings or reads one verse, while the other 'choir' listens. Then the second side chants the next verse, and the first 'choir' listens. And sometimes it is possible for the entire congregation to pray the entire psalm together in a 'metric' version (a hymn that uses a rhymed text of the psalm).

"God is *King of all the earth; sing to Him a psalm of praise*" ⁷¹ - or of lament, or of petition or contrition. All of our emotions, all of our reasons for praying can be found in the psalms.

The Responsorial Psalm can help us speak to God, sing His praise, and respond to His love.

61. After the First Reading comes the responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance, because it fosters meditation on the word of God. The responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should, as a rule, be taken from the Lectionary. It is preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung. . . If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God.

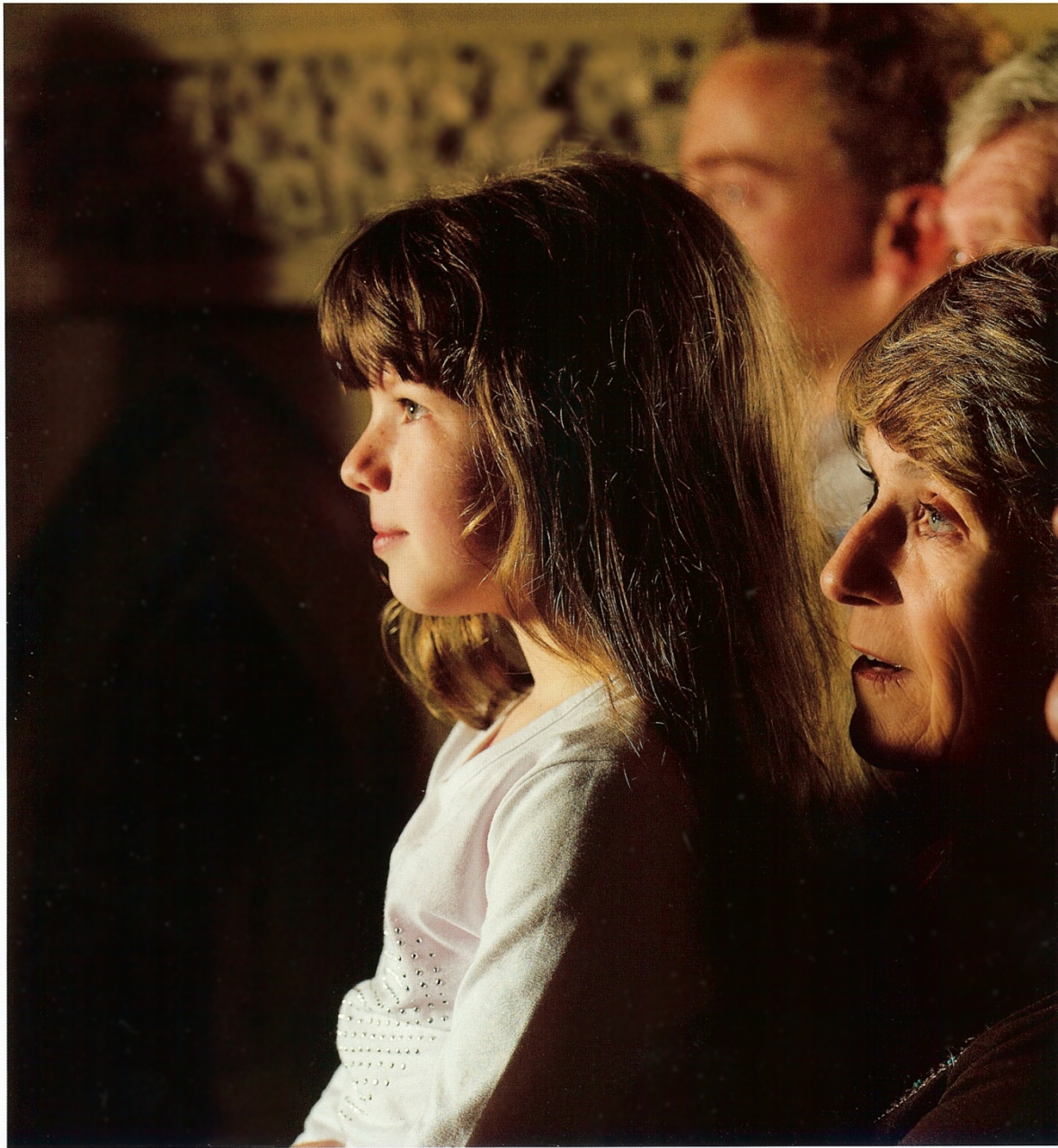
70 Romano Guardini, op cit, p 143

71 Psalm 147:7

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Second Reading

*The depth of the Christian Scriptures is boundless.
If I studied them, and nothing else, all life long,
I would still be making progress
in discovering their treasures.*

- Letter 137:3



In the Jewish synagogue service, in addition to readings from the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible) the 'Writings' (the historical books and Wisdom literature) and the books of the Prophets of Israel were read. Catholics usually read from these scriptures in the First Reading.

For the Second Reading of the Liturgy of the Word, however, we turn to our own Christian 'prophets' - the letters of Saints Peter, Paul, James, John, Jude. This reading was formerly called the Epistle; but that designation falls short of including other books of the New Testament that may be read at this point of the Mass: the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) or the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Eastern Churches, the reading before the Gospel is simply called 'the Apostle', a designation suitable for all the books of the New Testament that come down to us from the Apostles. In reading from these books, we continue the tradition described by St Justin Martyr: *The Memoirs of the Apostles or the Writings of me Prophets are read for as long as time allows.* ⁷²

The Second Reading is normally a "consecutive" reading. In other words, St Paul's Letter to the Colossians may be read, chapter by chapter (or nearly so) for five or six Sundays in succession; then a new epistle is begun and read to the end.

Unlike the First Reading, which is chosen to complement the Gospel, the Second Reading usually stands on its own. During Ordinary Time, most of an epistle, or even all of it, may be read chapter by chapter, Sunday after Sunday, until it is completed; then another epistle is read. Thus the Second Reading may not be thematically linked to the First Reading, Psalm and Gospel.

But in the major liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and on solemnities, the Second Reading is selected to correspond with the mystery or event being celebrated. For example, during the Christmas season we read the First Letter of St John, chapter by chapter. This letter recalls the mystery of God's love for us made incarnate in Christ.

In the First Reading, we reflect upon the triumph and tragedy of the People of Israel as they struggled to hear and practise the Covenant between God and themselves. In the Second Reading, we encounter the early Church, the New Israel, living its Christian faith as a pilgrim people.

When Paul or Peter, James or John or Jude teach, exhort or even reprimand our forebears in the Faith, we ask ourselves if we are doing any better today than they did then. And when the early Christian community is praised for its faith, hope and charity, we can examine ourselves to see if we are adding 'grace upon grace' ⁷³ as we take our place in the long procession of men, women and children who have 'heard the Word of God and acted upon it'. ⁷⁴

29. When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, all must listen with reverence to the readings from God's word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture God's word is addressed to all people of every era and is understandable to them, nevertheless, a fuller understanding and a greater effectiveness of the word is fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, the Homily, as part of the liturgical action.

72 St Justin Martyr, Apologia 1, 67

73 John 1:16

74 cf Luke 11:28

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Gospel Acclamation

*Love is the only sign
that distinguishes the children of God.
To show their love,
let them all sign themselves with the Cross of Christ,
let them all sing: "Alleluia!"*

- Sermon on | John 5:7



While everyone attending the Jewish Sabbath service remains standing, the *hazzan* or leader of the synagogue pulls aside the veil of the niche where the ark or chest containing the *Torah* scrolls is kept. With the congregation singing a joyful '*Hallelujah!*' (Hebrew for 'praise God'), the leader ceremoniously carries the large scrolls to the *bema* or platform, removes the two outer wrappings of the scroll, and places them on a reading stand or table.

Alleluia is a Hebrew word. It combines the imperative verb *hallelū* ('praise') and the word *Yah*, a shortened form of *Yahweh*, the name of God. It is used frequently in the Psalms, and the early Christians continued to sing *Alleluia* as an acclamation of praise. In the Apocalypse, the blessed in heaven are continually singing *Alleluia* before the throne of God. ⁷⁵

The Church Father Tertullian (c 160-220) tells us that Christians added the word to many of their prayers after the final Amen. ⁷⁶ And St Benedict (c 480-546) in his Rule for monasteries says that "*Alleluia often serves as an acclamation during the procession for the gospel...*" ⁷⁷

Alleluia was so familiar to the people that it was used not only in worship, but sometimes as a war cry, a warning signal, a magical word, a joyous exclamation, a song of ploughmen and boatmen, and even to sing babies to sleep in the nursery.

"*A Christian is an Alleluia from head to toe*". This saying is attributed to St Augustine (354-430), but some research of his writings produced only one quotation of his that comes anywhere close to the banner quote. It is this: "*Tota actio nostra, amen et alleluia erit*"... "*Our entire activity will be 'Amen' and 'Alleluia'*". ⁷⁸ However, here Augustine is talking about what our lives will be like in heaven. He explains that in eternity we will be totally united to God's will ('Amen') and we will be continually praising Him ('Alleluia'). Augustine comments on the word *Alleluia* in many sermons (e.g., 254, 256, 362).

Something that St Augustine did say is this: "*We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.*" ⁷⁹ Since every Sunday is 'a little Easter', it is fitting that the quintessential Easter acclamation should announce the presence of the Risen Christ as He speaks to us in His Gospel. *For the Church, the Gospel book is a verbal icon of Christ's manifestation to and presence among us. Above all, it is an icon of His Resurrection ... It is the image of the appearance of the Risen Lord in*

fulfillment of His promise: "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." ⁸⁰

The absence of the *Alleluia* during the season of Lent reminds us of our need for redemption in Christ, which we will celebrate with great solemnity at Easter, when *Alleluia* is once again our song.



62. After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the *Alleluia* or another chant indicated by the rubrics is sung, as required by the liturgical season. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel and professes its faith by means of the chant. It is sung by all while standing and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated if this is appropriate. The verse, however, is sung either by the choir or by the cantor. The *Alleluia* is sung in every season other than Lent. During Lent, in place of the *Alleluia*, the verse before the Gospel is sung.

75 cf Revelation 19

76 Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 27

77 St Benedict, *Rule for Monasteries*, 19

78 St Augustine, *Sermon 362,29* (PL 38:1224)

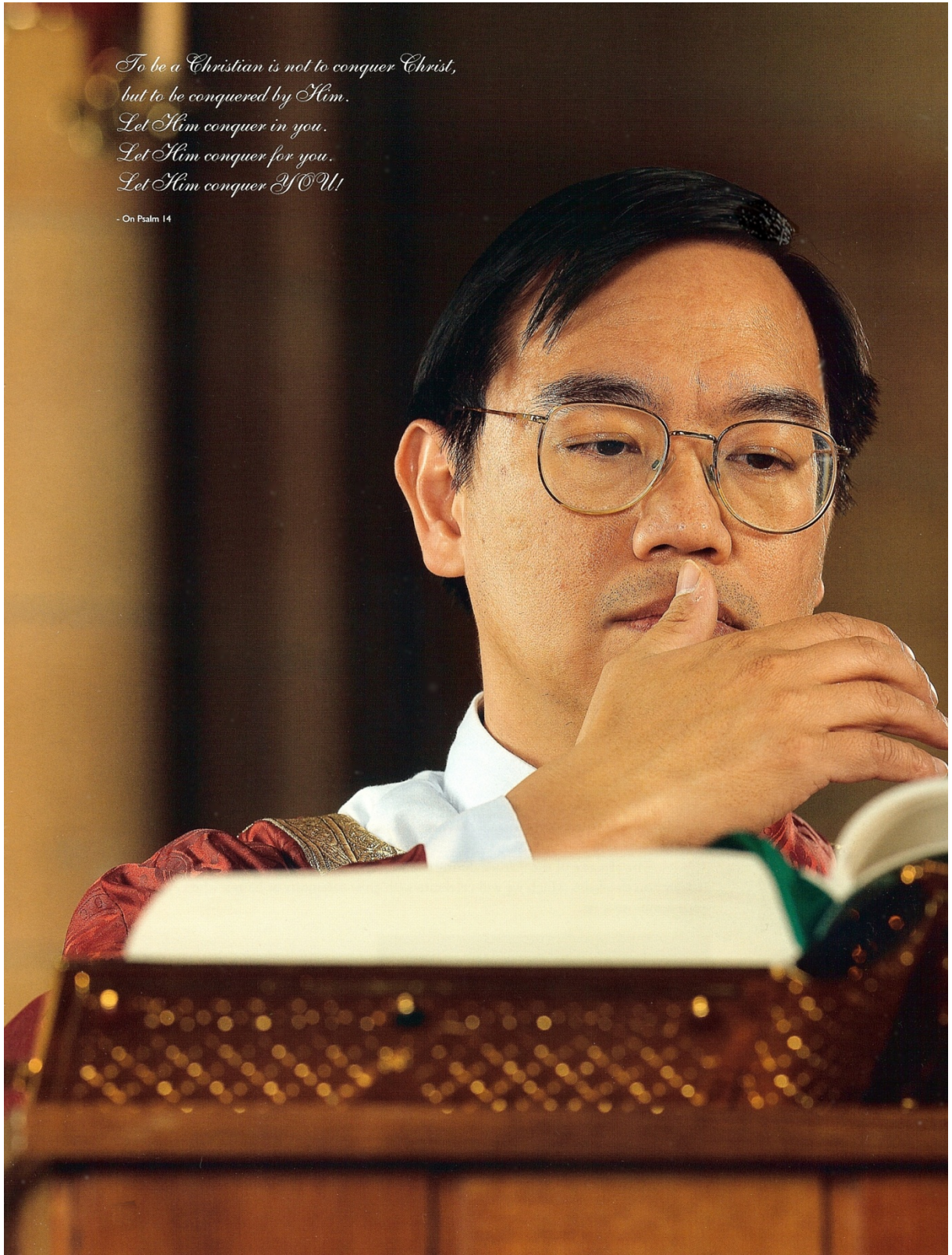
79 attributed to St Augustine; cf *Sermon 362:29*; *Exposition on Psalm 148*

80 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, p_

LITURGY OF THE WORD: **The Gospel: Welcoming the Good News into our lives**

*To be a Christian is not to conquer Christ,
but to be conquered by Him.
Let Him conquer in you.
Let Him conquer for you.
Let Him conquer YOU!*

- On Psalm 14



Whilst the assembly is singing the Gospel Acclamation, the deacon or priest who will proclaim the Gospel bows and prays that his heart and lips may be purified by the Lord, ⁸¹ so that he may worthily proclaim the words of Jesus.

Then he solemnly carries the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo. This movement may become a short procession that includes ministers carrying lights and incense, arriving at the ambo as the Acclamation ends. This is in keeping with ancient tradition:

The early Christians expressed honour for the physical presence of the Scriptures ... It was a book containing the Scriptures that was placed upon the altar to represent the presence of Christ in the church throughout the day ... Starting about 1150 in the West, people began to pay honour to the Eucharist in the way they previously had honoured the Scriptures: carrying them in procession, exposing them for veneration, putting them in a central place in the church on the altar, and showing outward signs of reverence to them by genuflecting and bowing ...

(But) the main honour that should be paid to the Scriptures is to hear them and obey them as the Word of God. The external expressions of honour to the book, however, are important because they force us as human beings to realise what we think of the Scriptures inside. ⁸²

As the Acclamation is sung and the Book of the Gospels is brought to the ambo, the assembly stands. This is one sign of faith that Christ Himself is present, speaking through the Gospel. The people's responses at the beginning and conclusion of the Gospel are also important to consider: "*Glory to You, Lord*" and "*Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*". Unlike the response "*Thanks be to God*" given at the conclusion of the other readings, the Gospel responses are directly addressed to Christ in the belief that He is present.

Using his thumb, the deacon or priest signs the Gospel text with a cross, and then signs his forehead, lips and heart. It is as if he wants to impress the very ink of the text upon his senses. Imitating his action, the members of the assembly sign themselves, silently welcoming the Good News into their thinking, speaking and loving. In so doing, we link ourselves to an ancient custom: *At all times be ready to sign yourselves carefully on the forehead ... When we make the Sign (of the*

Cross) on our foreheads and our eyes, we drive away him who seeks to destroy us.

83

We stand arrayed like soldiers, singing our *Alleluia* battle cry, arming ourselves with the protection of the Cross, ready to hear our Commander's orders. Indeed, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who speaks to us now, and Who wants to 'conquer in us and for us.'

133. If the Book of the Gospels is on the altar, the priest then takes it and goes to the ambo, carrying the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated and preceded by the lay ministers, who may carry the thurible and the candles. Those present turn towards the ambo as a sign of special reverence for the Gospel of Christ.

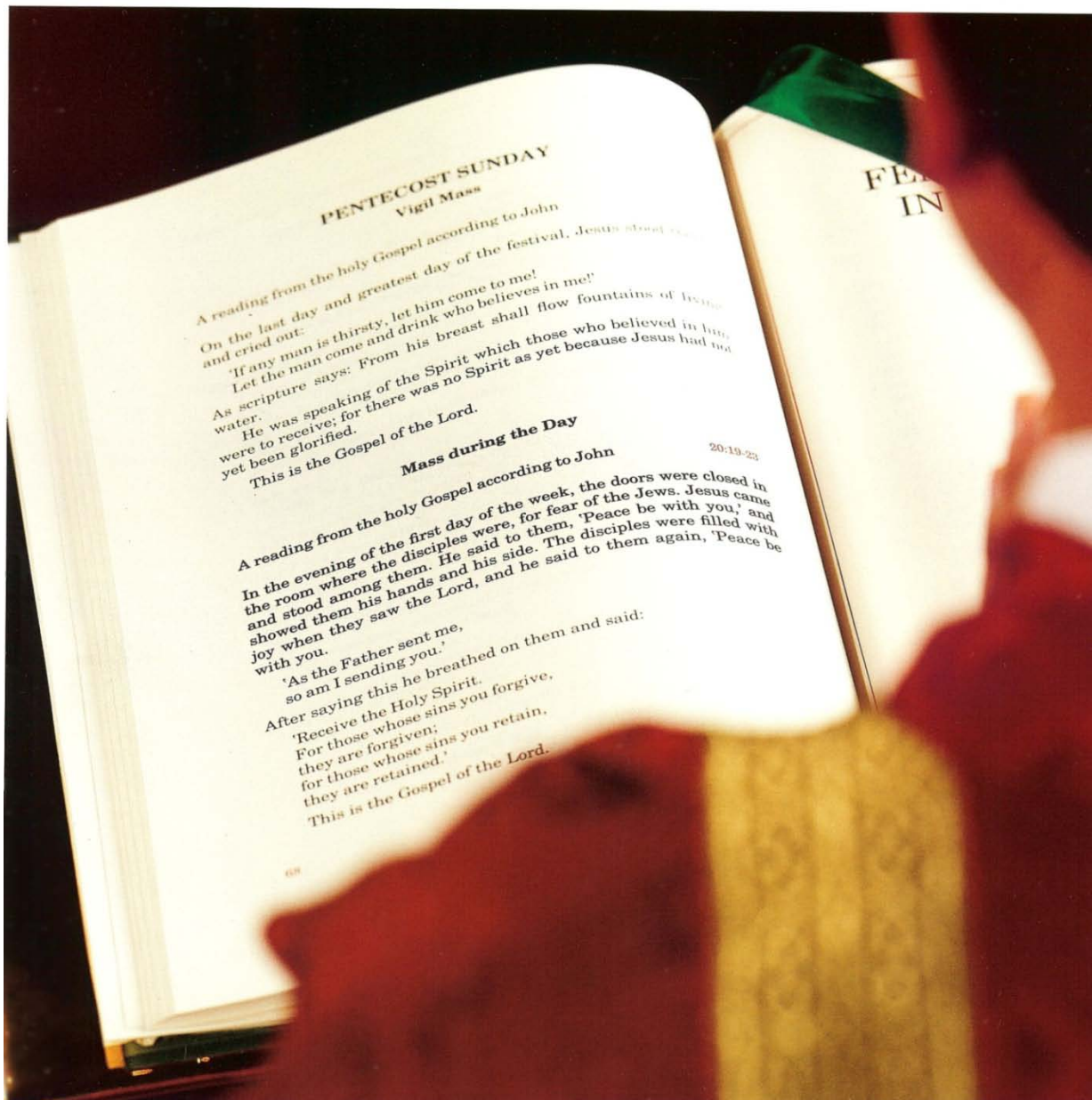
81 cf Isaiah 6:5-7

82 Romano Guardini, *Church & Eucharist*, 71

83 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 99-104

LITURGY OF THE WORD – The Gospel (Proclaiming Christ's Message)

*If you believe what you like in the Gospels,
and reject what you don't like,
it is not the Gospel you believe,
but yourself.*



When the *Torah* or Law of Moses is read in the Jewish synagogue, the *hazzan* (synagogue leader) points out to the reader the section of the Law that is appointed to be read that day, since it is divided into sections to ensure that the entire Law is read in three years. Thus the Catholic liturgy has a three-year cycle of Gospel readings, with their complementary first and second readings.

The *Torah* passage is first read in ancient Hebrew, and then translated line by line into the vernacular language. Since the reader can be any male member of the synagogue who is thirteen or older, the *hazzan* stands by the reader to correct any errors he might make. Further, lest the reader's hands soil the *Torah* scroll itself, a pointer is used to assist the reader in following the text.

This care for the proclamation of God's Word can serve as an admirable example for all readers of Scripture, but especially for the one who proclaims the Gospel, Christ's Law of love. There is no *hazzan* visible at the side of the Gospel reader. But the Church ensures that Christ's message is faithfully transmitted to His people by issuing approved translations of the sacred texts. That is why it is of the utmost importance that all readers, cleric and lay, read the Scriptures exactly as they appear in the liturgical books, without in any way changing the words to suit their own preferences.

Likewise, it is important for those who hear the Scriptures to be guided by the understanding of the Church's constant Tradition, handed on through the centuries, and not re-interpret them to suit the passing trends of the times. Otherwise, the word of God is in danger of becoming our own word, constantly changing to suit our own needs - or to allow us to avoid being confronted by the need for conversion.

Allowing the Gospel to sink into our lives not only requires letting go of the preconceived notions that dominate our thoughts, our words and our emotions, but also calls for an act of faith. Jesus tells us evil forces do not wish for us to give our assent. For this reason it is customary to make the Sign of the Cross (a way of thwarting evil) over our foreheads, over our lips, and over our hearts in preparation to truly hear the Gospel. ⁸⁴

The proclamation of the Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. Likewise, it should be a highpoint in the life of the Christian. For if we believe that the Gospel is the word of Christ Himself, and if we believe that Christ is the Son of God Who became flesh to show us how to live, then we - reader and listener - should be attentive.

For the word which Christ brought and which is set down in this book we are willing to stand up with a mind that is open; we are ready to confess it with our mouth; and above all we are determined to safeguard it faithfully in our hearts.

85

84 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 36

85 Michael Dubruiel, The How-To Book of the Mass, pp 120-121

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Gospel :Sealed with a Kiss

*It is so easy to listen to Christ,
so convenient to praise the Gospels
and so nice to acclaim the preacher.
But to endure to the end – that really means
responding to the voice of the Shepherd.*

-- On John's Gospel 45:13



134....The priest kisses the book, saying quietly: *Per evangelica dicta* (Through the words of the Gospel ...)

Christianity took root in Mediterranean societies - first Palestine, then Turkey, Greece and Rome. For these cultures, kissing has different meanings: yes, it can be romantic, but it more often symbolises friendship, affection, congratulations, respect and reverence - all forms of love.

The 'liturgical kiss' is a part of Catholic ritual from apostolic times: *Greet one another with a holy kiss.*⁸⁶ But its meaning is seldom appreciated in societies where anything other than 'romantic kissing' is seen as 'something foreigners do', and where even some fathers hesitate to kiss their own sons after they reach a certain age.

We can see the liturgical kiss at Mass when the priest bends down and kisses the altar of sacrifice; and when the deacon, priest or bishop kisses the Gospel text that has been proclaimed. Similarly, the laity are invited to kiss the Cross on Good Friday, and they may kiss the relic of a saint that is presented for veneration on a special occasion. And as has been mentioned, the 'sign of peace' was originally the 'kiss of peace'.

Is this 'sentimental' kissing really so foreign to us? Perhaps not, if we consider the fact that we may have, behind closed doors, kissed the photograph of a loved one who is away on a journey, or priest who has died. There are even those who have rolled over in bed to kiss the pillow of a spouse who is away. It's the next best thing.

Likewise, at the conclusion of the Gospel reading, the deacon or priest proclaims, 'The Gospel of the Lord.' Christ Himself has spoken to us, and the reader is moved to kiss the very text, saying quietly as he does so, 'By the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out.'

The message he has proclaimed is powerful, salvific and life-giving. It requires a response, which will come in the Homily that will guide our personal resolutions to be more faithful to the Lord's message. But first, a kiss.

This kiss isn't simply decorative, nor is it pious nonsense or mere sentiment. It is a powerful action that tells us that something great has occurred: Christ Himself has spoken His word to us. He has taught us, consoled us, challenged us, strengthened us. We are saved by His holy Gospel, His Good News - and that is worth a kiss, and even more: it is worth our lives.

LITURGY OF THE WORD – The Homily

*O Lord, You have inspired faith in me
by the Incarnation of Your Son
and through the ministry of Your preacher.*

– Confessions 1:1



65. The Homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners... After the Homily a brief period of silence is appropriately observed.

When the Jews of Jesus' time gathered for a synagogue service, they first listened to the *Torah* reading assigned to that day. Six other readings and commentaries followed, with the last always being taken from the Prophets and reflecting the theme of the *Torah* passage. The text was brief, no more than three verses, and was the only one chosen beforehand by the reader himself. Then the reader gave a spontaneous commentary on what he had just read. The man who did this was said to perform *maphtir*; thus Jesus one day, in the synagogue of Nazareth, performed *maphtir*.⁸⁷

Although He could have chosen three verses, Jesus chose only two - Isaiah 61:1-2. St Luke describes for us the usual synagogue practice: *He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down ... Then He began to speak to them.* Any male who was of age could preach in the synagogue. However, orthodox Jews were thoroughly schooled in the scriptures and their interpretation, and were always guided by the *rabbi* (teacher) and the *hazzan* (synagogue leader).

Christians continued to follow the Jewish practice of preaching following the readings, although from the beginning this ministry was restricted to the clergy: *When the reader has finished, the presider speaks, exhorting us to live by these noble teachings.*⁸⁸

The Greek word *homilia* means 'instruction' or 'informal discourse', while the Latin word *sermo* means 'talk' or 'conversation'. Some think there is no real distinction.

But in the homilies of the early Church Fathers that have come down to us, we can see the difference. A homily not only explains the Scriptures and applies them to our lives; it actually weaves the scriptural text into the whole, so that the homilist's text strongly relies on the Scriptures. This requires research and preparation, and a good familiarity with scriptural texts, so there is a coherent flow from scripture to homiletic comment and instruction.

A sermon, on the other hand, is generally seen as more of an exhortation that may have a scriptural text as its starting point but does not heavily rely on Scripture throughout. Sometimes a sermon has little or nothing to do with the Scriptures just read in Mass.

The Second Vatican Council restored preaching to its rightful place in the liturgy, and recommended that preaching follow the homiletic model: *A fuller understanding and a greater effectiveness of the word is fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, the Homily, as part of the liturgical action.* ⁸⁹

It is mandated that *there is to be a Homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation at all Masses that are celebrated with the participation of a congregation; it may not be omitted without a serious reason. It is recommended on other days.* ⁹⁰ In keeping with ancient Church practice, the Homily is given by an ordained cleric (bishop, priest or deacon) but never a lay person. ⁹¹

A major part of the ministry of Jesus was preaching. At His trial, Jesus stated: *"I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple ... "* ⁹² Walking along with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, *He explained to them the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about Himself.* ⁹³

The Homily, then, is an opportunity for the ordained minister to follow in the footsteps of the Master and 'break open the Word', that everyone attending Mass can more fully recognise Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread. ⁹⁴

87 Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12

88 Luke 4:16-30

89 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 67

90 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, nos 7,33,52; and the General Instruction on the Roman Missal, 2007 edition no. 29

91 cf. GIRM no.66, Code of Canon Law no. 767.1

92 John 18:20

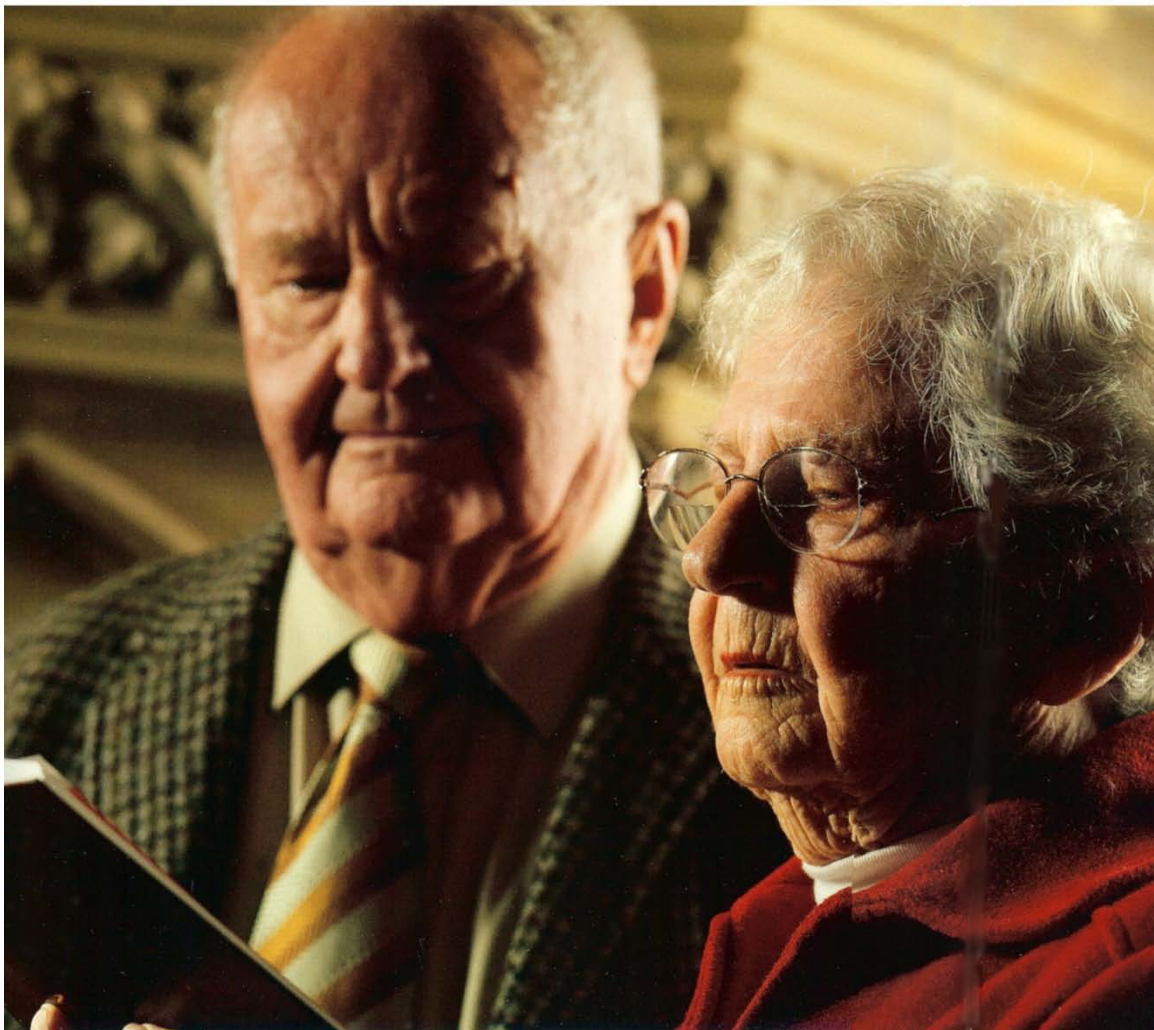
93 Luke 24:27

94 cf Luke 24:35

LITURGY OF THE WORD – The Credo: Each One's Profession of Faith

*When we see God,
we shall not have to say the Creed.
Our vision of God
will reward us for our present faith.*

- Sermon 8.13



After the homily, the assembly stands to proclaim its faith as a united community. However, each member of the assembly renews this commitment individually: the Latin verb Credo means "I believe," not "We believe."

The years immediately following the Second Vatican Council saw a strong emphasis upon the Mass as a communal celebration, as a community meal.

However, in any contractual agreement or legal document, each party must sign individually. In the taking of an oath, even when taken in a group, the response is always "I do", not "We do". Likewise, at a wedding, the rubric (liturgical directive) at the questioning of the spouses regarding their intentions in entering marriage states: *Each answers the questions separately*. The bride and groom come to the altar as a couple, but they make their promises as individuals, each saying, "I do."

This background can help us understand why the Profession of Faith begins, "I believe in one God." We proclaim our faith together as a community, but each member of the Church confesses the faith individually. *When we read the prayers of the Mass ... we notice that the word I appears very seldom, and never without a special reason. It is found quite clearly (in the Confiteor) when each one present acknowledges his sins; in the prayers immediately before Holy Communion; and in the Credo, when the individual, conscious of his personal responsibility, expresses his belief in divine revelation.*⁹⁵

What is that revelation? That there is one true God. Our Profession of Faith is a direct descendant of the moment in the Jewish synagogue service when the people proclaim the Shema': "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one God ... " ⁹⁶ But as Christians we acknowledge our faith in the truth that the Gospels have revealed: that the one true God exists as a community of three distinct but inseparable Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the early Church, the Profession of Faith was not made every Sunday, but was mainly associated with Baptism: *We invoke upon the one who is enlightened and purified the Name of Jesus Christ , Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate; and of the Holy Spirit, Who foretold the whole story of Jesus through the Prophets .*⁹⁷ As the candidate was immersed three times, or water was poured three times over the candidate, the baptising minister asked the now familiar questions: *Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord ... ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church ... ?* To each question, the candidate responded, "I do."

We first encounter these questions in the *Apostolic Tradition* of St Hippolytus of Rome (c 215); they are the direct origin of what is known today as the Apostles' Creed. The Nicene Creed we profess on Sundays was composed at two Councils of the Church: at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

The very precise nature of the Creed underscores the fact that our belief is not an opinion. As individuals and as a people, we put all our faith in God. The Creed expresses our absolute trust in the one God Who created, redeemed and sanctifies us as individual members of one Church.

67. The purpose of the *Symbolum* or Profession of Faith, or Creed, is that the whole gathered people may respond to the word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith by reciting the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use, before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist.

68. The Creed is to be sung or said by the priest together with the people on Sundays and Solemnities. It may be said also at particular celebrations of a more solemn character.

95 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 99-104

96 Deuteronomy 6:5ff

97 St Justin Martyr, *op cit*, 61

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The General Intercessions

*Extend your love over the whole earth
if you desire to love Christ,
for Christ's members are all over the earth.*

— Sermon on I John 10:7



When our Jewish brethren gather for worship in the synagogue, they pray a series of eighteen 'benedictions' or blessings, asking God to respond to their needs. Some of these are individual while others are for the local faith community, the Jews in the 'Diaspora' (dispersal around the globe) and the world in general.

These eighteen blessings are also prayed by Jewish men as part of their daily morning prayers. Jesus would have learned them as a boy from St Joseph, and they would have prayed them standing in the doorway of their home in Nazareth, facing south toward Jerusalem. Later, Jesus would have prayed the blessings every morning with His apostles.

St Justin Martyr, describing the liturgy of the 2nd century, tells us: *We pray fervently for ourselves ... and for people everywhere, in whatever place they may be.* ⁹⁸

The catechumens, those who were studying the Faith and were not as yet baptised, were not allowed to be present for the prayers and were dismissed after the reading of the Gospel. Thus the list of petitions, prayed only by those who professed the Faith, came to be known as the Prayer (not 'prayers') of the Faithful.

This prayer is described in detail in the early 5th century Apostolic Constitutions: *The deacon says, "Let no one come near who does not have the right. Let us all, the faithful, kneel. Let us pray to God through His Christ; let all of us beseech God fervently: for the peace and tranquility of the world and the holy churches ... for those who are afflicted by sickness ... for those who are traveling by land or sea ... for those condemned to the mines, to exile, to prison and fetters for the sake of the Name of the Lord ... for those who are outside the Church and astray ... for the children in the Church ... for one another ... for every departed Christian soul ... "* ⁹⁹ Because the prayer intentions covered a variety of needs, most of which were for people beyond the local community, they were also called the Universal Prayer, or the General Intercessions.

At first the petitions were quite lengthy. A form of this type of prayer is retained in the Solemn Prayers of Good Friday. It was the influence of the Eastern Church which led to shortening the petitions into the form of a litany - brief sentences to which the people respond, "*Kyrie, eleison!*" "Lord, have mercy!" The General

Intercessions gradually disappeared from the Roman liturgy altogether, leaving only a very brief *Kyrie* litany at the start of Mass. The liturgical renewal inaugurated by Vatican Council II returned the Prayer of the Faithful to the liturgy.

The nature of this prayer requires that the intercessions include intentions that are global, since ours is a 'catholic' or 'universal' Church. *Individuals must shake off the narrow trammels of their own thoughts, and make a far more comprehensive world of ideas their own: they must go beyond their little personal aims and adopt the educative purpose of the great fellowship of the liturgy. It goes without saying, therefore, that they are obliged to ... ask for things which do not directly concern them; they must espouse and plead before God causes which do not affect them personally, and which merely arise out of the needs of the community at large ...*¹⁰⁰

69. In the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world.

70. As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

- a. for the needs of the Church;
- b. for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c. for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d. for the local community.

Nevertheless, in a particular celebration, such as Confirmation, Marriage, or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.

98 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65:1

99 The Apostolic Constitutions, VII, 10, 1-22

100 Romano Guardini, The Spirit of the Liturgy, pp 141-149

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Preparing the Altar**



The spreading of special table linens upon the dining room table is a sign that company is coming, and a great meal is being planned. Similarly, the sacred linens used at Mass, and the care used in preparing the altar, are signs that a special Guest is being invited into our assembly, and He is providing us with a Banquet beyond compare.

The Mass, although a ritual meal, is not an informal affair. St Thomas Aquinas reminds us that the Mass is a *sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us!* ¹⁰¹

The Last Supper, being a highly ritualised meal, would have been dignified with special linens and vessels. To this day, observant Jews have linens and dishes reserved solely for the annual celebration of the Passover Seder. In the same way, Catholics set aside special vessels and linens for use in divine worship.

The Church Fathers tell us that linen was used from the earliest times: "*What Christian is unaware that in celebrating the sacred Mysteries the wood (of the altar) is covered with a linen cloth?*" ¹⁰² And again: "*He (Pope Sylvester I, r 314-335) decreed that the Sacrifice should not be celebrated upon a silken or dyed*

cloth, but only on linen, sprung from the earth, as the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ was buried in a clean linen shroud." ¹⁰³

Coloured hangings over the sides of the altar can highlight a season or feast, but the Church prescribes that the altar cloth covering the mensa or altar table must be white ¹⁰⁴ and that the altar cloth and the corporal should be separate altar linens. ¹⁰⁵

The pall (from the Latin *palla*, 'cover') is a stiff square of linen which is placed upon the chalice to keep dust and insects from falling into the chalice and its contents.

The corporal (from the Latin *corpus*, 'body') has its name in common with the military rank of corporal, originally an army commander's personal bodyguard. Eucharistic vessels are always placed upon a corporal (more than one if necessary), but never simply upon the larger altar cloth. This is out of reverence for small particles of the consecrated Host, or even entire Hosts, that may fall upon the corporal during the Breaking of the Bread or the transfer of communion Hosts from one vessel to another.

If not detected during Mass, particles will at least be collected and preserved upon the corporal. When the folded corporal is returned to the sacristy, these particles will be disposed of reverently rather than left lying upon the altar. Altar linens are rinsed in the *sacrarium*, a special sink in the sacristy whose drain goes directly into the ground rather than into the common sewer. ¹⁰⁶

Also placed upon the altar are the purifier or purificator, a linen napkin used for wiping the lips and cleansing the sacred vessels; and the Missal, the book of Mass prayers.

A young man takes his beloved to an expensive meal in a first-class restaurant, complete with white linen and candles, when he is going to ask her to be his bride. In the same way, we - the Bride - are being invited to a wedding Feast at Mass, a sacred Banquet. The meal is indeed expensive, for the price is Christ's own precious Blood.

73. At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ's Body and Blood, are brought to the altar. First, the altar, the Lord's table, which is the centre of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared by placing on it the corporal, purificator, Missal and chalice (unless the chalice is prepared at the credence table).

- 101 St Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers of
Corpus Christi
- 102 St Optatus of Milevis, Against the Donatists, 6:2
- 103 Liber Pontificalis
- 104 GIRM no. 297
- 105 GIRM no. 334; cf 280
- 106 GIRM nos. 170, 304

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Collection

*Charity, as St Paul writes, "is not self-seeking",
meaning that it places the common good before its own,
not its own before the common good.
So whenever you show greater concern for the common good than for your own,
you may know that you are growing in charity.*

-- Rule for Monasteries 5:2



73. It is well that money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, should be received. These are to be put in a suitable place but away from the Eucharistic table.

There is one part of the Sunday Eucharist that has not changed from apostolic times, and of this the Church can be justly proud.

The Consecration? No - some ancient liturgies don't even include the words of institution. The readings? No - for several centuries there were arguments about what could or could not be read. The elements - bread and wine, certainly; but some places in ancient times included milk and honey at liturgies of Christian initiation.

The part that has never changed is the collection; it is an apostolic tradition. Writing to the Christians in Corinth, St Paul gives this directive: *Now in regard to the collection for the holy ones you also should do as I ordered the churches of Galatia. On the first day of the week each of you should set aside and save whatever one can afford ... And when I arrive, I shall send with letters of recommendation those whom you have approved to take your gracious gift to Jerusalem.* ¹⁰⁷

That this practice continued from apostolic times can be seen in St Justin Martyr's words: *The wealthy among us help the needy, and we always lend one another assistance ... Those who desire to make gifts, each just as he wishes. These gifts are collected and handed over to the presider. It is he who assists the orphans and widows, those who are in want through sickness or for some other reason, prisoners, strangers passing through; briefly, he helps all who are in need.* ¹⁰⁸

It is one of the most ancient customs of the Church for the people themselves to provide the bread and wine for the Eucharist. Over time, they also brought oil, candles, wheat, grapes, and other items needed for liturgical rites. Money and food, used to sustain both the clergy and the poor, were also brought forward at the Offertory.

In former times, however, these gifts were not brought directly to the priest, but placed on tables or ledges in the transepts, to the left and right of the altar. Deacons would then bring whatever was needed to the altar for consecration; during the week, they would distribute the other goods and money as needed. It was to these tables that the people returned at Communion time, to receive the Eucharist. The tables developed into the Communion rails we still see in many older churches today. Thus the rails were not 'barriers' between the clergy and laity, but 'meeting points' which helped provide a focus for orderly processions at Offertory and Communion times.

Today, the money that is collected at Mass supplies the operational needs of the parish, sustains the clergy, and assists the needy. For better or for worse, money symbolises what really matters to us; thus giving our money is a symbolic but very real way of dying to ourselves. Generously giving some of it away is a challenge. It is not the amount we give that counts as much as the spirit of generosity with which we give it, as Jesus reminds us in His remarks about the widow who gave to the Temple collection all she had.¹⁰⁹

In the same way that Our Lord handed himself over to sinners and was sacrificed on the Cross for our salvation, we are called to give of ourselves in a variety of ways, including sharing our money with others. This is not to re-create Christ's sacrifice, but rather to participate in it.¹¹⁰

107 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; cf Galatians 2:10, Romans 15:25-29; 2 Corinthians 8-9

108 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 67

109 cf Luke 21:1-4

110 cf Michael Dubruiel, op cit, p 158

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Presentation of the Gifts

*The visible altar is the emblem of our faith itself in the inner temple of God.
Whatever offering we present to God at His altar, then . . . cannot be acceptable to God
unless it is sustained by the sincerity of our faith,
and, as it were, placed on that altar firmly and immovably.*

— Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount 10:27



Pious believers everywhere place gifts upon the altar so that the Godhead may accept them. These gifts belong to the Godhead and are withdrawn from human use through burning or pouring out.¹¹¹

The first part of the Mass was formerly called the Mass of the Catechumens. The catechumens, those desiring to join the Church, were allowed to hear the Scripture readings and homily during the Liturgy of the Word.

But then they were dismissed, and only those who had been baptised stayed for the next part, the Mass of the Faithful. Only the baptised made the Profession of Faith and joined in the Prayer of the Faithful. And only the baptised brought forward the elements to be consecrated: the bread and wine.

This presentation of gifts is a right and duty of the Catholic faithful. Thus it is inappropriate for anyone who does not have Catholic faith in the Eucharist and does not share Catholic faith in the Church that celebrates the Eucharist to present the bread and wine that will become the Eucharist.

This may seem harsh to some, until it is recalled that the early Church did not permit those without Catholic faith to attend the Liturgy of the Eucharist at all. In today's open society, we may not see a need for such a strict exclusion. Nevertheless, we cannot stand in a line of liturgical continuity with our forebears if we bring non-Catholics into the Eucharistic action itself.

Indeed, the Offertory procession is not simply a functional or decorative aspect of the Liturgy. It is the first of the four movements that make up the Eucharistic action as given us by Christ Himself: *The day before He suffered He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to His disciples ...*¹¹²

"He took bread" - this is the Offertory, when the people present the gifts for sacrifice and the priest takes them and places them on the altar.

During the Middle Ages, reverence for the Eucharist and a consciousness of personal unworthiness caused people to receive Communion much less frequently than today; often it was only the priest who received. Hence there was no need for quantities of bread and wine to be presented, and the Offertory procession came to be used only for special events like ordinations or the Chrism Mass. Its restoration by the liturgical renewal of the 1960s is a welcome return to the practice of the early Church.

Because our Catholic faith tells us that the bread and wine we present will become the Body and Blood of Christ, those who present the bread and wine must be Catholic believers. The gifts represent us, and those who bring them

to the altar represent the community of believers who are asking the priest to take them and change them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

73. The offerings are then brought forward. It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or the deacon and carried to the altar. Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance.

74. The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory chant which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. Singing may always accompany the rite at the Offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts.

- 111 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 53-57
- 112 cf words of Consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Offering the Bread**

*We offer to Him the Host of our humility
and praise upon the altar of our heart.*

--The City of God 10:3



Bread is food. It is wholesome, nourishing food for which we never lose our appetite. Under the form of bread God becomes for us the Food of Life. "We break a bread," writes St Ignatius of Antioch, "that is the food of immortality." ... Bread gives us solid and substantial strength. ¹¹³

Following the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine with water to celebrate the Lord's Supper. ¹¹⁴

Without a doubt, Jesus would have used unleavened bread, matzah, at the Last Supper. This bread was unlike the usual bread baked by Jewish women; it contained no yeast. When Moses announced to the enslaved Israelites that "This is the night!" of their deliverance, he advised the women to bake bread for the journey, but to omit the yeast since there was no time to allow the dough to rise. *"Keep, then, this custom of the unleavened bread."* ¹¹⁵

St Paul indicates that this custom was kept by the Church, at least in the earliest days when Christianity still had strong ties to Judaism: *Get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves into a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast, then, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* ¹¹⁶

But the Ebionite heresy (c 140) demanded that Christians keep all the precepts of the old Law of Moses. By this time, Christians had been excommunicated by the Jews, so leavened bread was used for the Eucharist in many places as a protest.

Charlemagne's advisor Alcuin indicated that at least by 798 unleavened bread was again the rule: *The bread which is consecrated into the Body of Christ ought to be most pure, without leaven or any other additive.* ¹¹⁷

Today, most Eastern Churches use leavened bread, while the Western Church and some Eastern Churches use unleavened bread. Both kinds are valid matter for consecration, but each ritual Church ordinarily follows its own tradition in order to have a licit celebration.

Not only the kind of bread, but the words used in presenting it to God have their origin in the Passover and Sabbath meal rituals. Jesus often prayed these Hebrew words: *Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu, melek ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.* "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth." His disciples would solemnly respond together: *Amein* - "Amen - this is true."

At Passover, Jesus would add the special blessing for Passover: *"Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who commands us to eat matzah."* Again the response came: *"Amen."*

The priest uses similar words in the Mass. In this way, the Church continues the tradition it has maintained for centuries: *In all that we offer, we bless the Creator of the universe through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.*

118

As the bread is presented to God, all of us can present ourselves with our hopes and fears, our needs and our joys. Indeed, the offering that the priest makes on behalf of us all is an acknowledgement of God's Lordship, a recognition that all things are His. ¹¹⁹ *Blessed be God for ever.* ¹²⁰

75. The bread and wine are placed on the altar by the priest to the accompaniment of the prescribed formulas.

320-21. The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently baked and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened ... It is expedient that the Eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful.

113 Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* pp 65-68

114 GIRM no. 319

115 cf Exodus 12:8, 15, 17-20, 34

116 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

117 Alcuin, Letter 90, to the Brothers in Lyons

118 St Justin Martyr, loc cit

119 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 53-57

120 Roman Missal

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Mixing the Wine and Water**

*He was made a sharer in our mortality
that we might be sharers in His divinity.
We were made partakers in the One (Christ), unto life.
He became a partaker in us many, unto death.*

— On Psalm 118:19, 6



St Justin Martyr tells us: *Then ... and a cup of wine to which water has been added are brought to the one who is presiding over the assembly of the brethren.* ¹²¹

The use of wine was widespread in the Near East. Palestine was a wine-producing country, and the wines of Lebanon and Helbon (a city northeast of Damascus) were particularly good: *They will cultivate vines as renowned as the wine of Helbon.* ¹²²

The Bible credits Noah with the invention of wine, and also with the discovery of its intoxicating effects: *Noah, a tiller of the soil, was the first to plant the vine. He drank some of the wine, and while he was drunk ...* ¹²³

Because of its strength and its heavy texture, the ancients rarely drank their wine without first diluting it with water. This weakened wine is used as a figure of humanity weakened by sin: *Your silver has turned into dross, your wine is watered.* ¹²⁴

In the Western Churches, the mingling of the water and wine is seen to represent Christ's taking the people and their sins to Himself. The wine represents the strong and rich redemptive power of Christ, into which our frail humanity - represented by the small amount of water - is absorbed: *We see that the water stands for the people, whereas the wine stands for the Blood of Christ. When water is united with wine in the chalice, the people are made one with Christ; the believing people are joined and united with Him in Whom they believe.* ¹²⁵

The Churches of the East offer another interpretation, namely, that the wine and water in the one chalice represent the divine and human natures in Christ, present in one Person. The prayer said quietly by the priest reflects the traditions of both East and West: *By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, Who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.* ¹²⁶

Some evangelical Christian churches use grape juice instead of wine, due to their strict prohibition against the drinking of alcohol. Mormons use only water. But in the Catholic Church, true wine with

alcohol content but no additives (such as are found in port wine), mixed with a small amount of water is used in the celebration of the Eucharist, following the custom of Jesus and His apostles. This is the wine that will gladden our hearts. ¹²⁷ *Blessed be God for ever!*

142. After this, as the minister presents the cruets, the deacon or priest stands at the side of the altar and pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly: *Per huius aquae et vini mysterium* (By the mystery of this water and wine ...)

322. The wine for the Eucharistic celebration must be from the fruit of the grapevine (*cf. Lk 22: 1 B*), natural and unadulterated, that is, without admixture of extraneous substances.

121 St Justin Martyr, *op cit*, 65

122 Hosea 14:8; cf also Ezekiel 27:18

123 Genesis 9:20-21

124 Isaiah 1:22

125 St Cyprian, Letter 63

126 prayer at the mixing of the wine and water

127 cf Psalm 104:14

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Offering the Wine**

*When you begin to live a godly life in Christ,
you enter the wine-press.
So prepare yourselves for the pressing,
but don't be dried-up grapes —
otherwise nothing will come out of the wine-press!*

- On Psalm 55:4



The *Didache* ('The Teaching'), a 1st century Christian text that gives us prayers used in early celebrations of the Eucharist, includes these words: *We give You thanks, our Father, for the holy Vine of David Your servant, that You have revealed to us through Jesus, Your Child. Glory to You for ever!* ¹²⁸

When Christ the true Vine ¹²⁹ blessed a cup of wine at the Last Supper, a number of scriptural symbols and practical uses of wine came together in the Eucharist in a wonderful way.

In the production of wine, the first press was done by treading the grapes with the feet: *In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath.* ¹³⁰ This was an occasion of great joy, accompanied by shouting and singing: *The Lord shouts aloud like those who tread the grape.* ¹³¹

This foot-stomping of grapes was a sign of joy; its absence signified the absence of God: *There is no longer wine in the presses, the treader of grapes treads no more, no more do shouts of joy ring out.* ¹³²

And the treading of grapes could mean the vengeful judgment of God: *I have trodden the winepress alone. Of the men of My people not one was with me. In My anger I trod them down, trampled them in My wrath. Their juice splattered My garments, and all My clothes are stained ... I crushed the people in My fury, trampled them in My anger, and made the juice of them run all over the ground.* ¹³³ These words inspired the famous hymn: *"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored."* ¹³⁴

The Scriptures exalt wine as a celebratory drink: *Their hearts will be cheered as though by wine.* ¹³⁵ It 'elevates moods': *Procure wine for the heart that is full of bitterness. Let him drink and forget his misfortune, and remember his misery no more.* ¹³⁶

Wine also has healing effects: the Good Samaritan treating the beaten man *went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them.* ¹³⁷ St Paul famously prescribed it for his disciple St Timothy: *You should give up drinking only water and have a little wine for the sake of your digestion and the frequent bouts of illness that you have.* ¹³⁸

And wine is a scriptural symbol of love and fraternal friendship: *I come into my garden, my sister, my promised bride ... I drink my wine ... Eat, friends, and drink; drink deep, my dearest friends.* ¹³⁹

Joy, sorrow, judgment, celebration, healing, weakness, love, friendship - all of this came together when, towards the end of the Passover meal, Jesus took the fourth cup of wine, the 'cup of blessing', blessed it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: *Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of My Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant ...* ¹⁴⁰

The purpose of wine is not only to quench thirst, but also to give pleasure and satisfaction and exhilaration. "My cup, how goodly it is, how plenteous!" Literally, how intoxicating, though not in the sense of drinking to excess. Wine possesses a sparkle, a perfume, a vigour that expands and clears the imagination. Under the form of wine Christ gives us His divine Blood. It is no plain and sober draught. It was bought at a great price ... "Blood of Christ, inebriate me!" prays St Ignatius Loyola, that knight of the burning heart. ¹⁴¹

142. (The priest) returns to the middle of the altar, takes the chalice with both hands, raises it a little, and says quietly: *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed are you, Lord ...). Then he places the chalice on the corporal and covers it with a pall, as appropriate. If however, there is no Offertory chant and the organ is not played, in the presentation of the bread and wine the priest may say the formulas of blessing aloud, to which the people make the acclamation: *Benedictus Deus in saecula* (Blessed be God for ever).

128 Didache

129 cf John 15:1-6

130 Nehemiah 13:15

131 Jeremiah 25:30

132 Jeremiah 38:33

133 Isaiah 63:3,6

134 Julia Ward Howe, The Battle Hymn of the Republic

135 Zechariah 10:7

136 Proverbs 31:6-7

137 Luke 10:34

138 1 Timothy 5:23

139 Song of Songs 5:1

140 cf words of Consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer

141 Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, pp 65-68

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: A Prayer of Humility

*Would you like to be great?
Start by being humble.
The higher the building,
the deeper must be its foundation.*

- Sermon 70:1-2



143. After placing the chalice upon the altar, the priest bows profoundly and says quietly: *In spiritu humilitatis* (In a spirit of humility ...)

This brief prayer finds its inspiration in the words of Azariah, one of the three young men in the fiery furnace. He longs for the sacrifices that had been offered in the Temple before the Exile of the Jews in Babylon. But he has come to realise that it is the spiritual sacrifice that pleases God best: *With contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; as though it were holocausts of rams and bullocks, or thousands of fat lambs, so let our sacrifice be in your presence today as we follow You unreservedly, for those who trust in You cannot be put to shame.* ¹⁴²

The prayer first appeared in various prayer books of the Middle Ages, and gradually became part of the Preparation of the Gifts. When Pope St Pius V codified the Roman Missal in 1570, in accordance with the decrees of the Council of Trent, this prayer was made obligatory.

Although its text is not from the earliest centuries of Christianity, the prayer's expression of the awareness of our own unworthiness is common to many ancient liturgies. Here is an example: *Cast Your eyes on us, Lord; we lay our weaknesses before You. Grant pardon and mercy to us all. Have pity on Your people, show them Your goodness, make them generous, chaste and pure.* ¹⁴³

Humility is necessary not only for the priest. It is a virtue needed by anyone who desires to grow in a relationship with the Creator. It is a prerequisite to sainthood, as St John Chrysostom reminds us: *Humility comes first ... without it, it is impossible to be saved. Even if one fasts, prays and gives alms, if he does so with a proud spirit, all of these are trifling things and are done foolishly, since the virtue of humility is absent.* ¹⁴⁴

St Augustine agrees: *God sees how faltering our steps are, and so He has made a way for us. This way is first of all, humility; second, humility; third, humility; and however often you should ask me the way, I would say the same ... If humility does not precede and accompany and follow every good work we do, if it is not set before us to look upon, and beside us to lean upon, and behind us to fence us in, pride will take from our hand any good deed we do.* ¹⁴⁵

Pope Blessed John XXIII, wrote these words in his last will and testament: *The sense of my littleness and unworthiness has always kept me good company, making me humble and tranquil, and permitting me the joy of putting my best efforts into a continual exercise of obedience and love for souls and for the interests of the Kingdom of Jesus, my Lord and my all. To Him be all the glory: for me and for my own merits, only His mercy.* ¹⁴⁶

We come to Holy Mass to imitate Jesus in His self-offering to His Father. Although He was the Son of God, He humbled Himself to become a man and to be obedient even unto death. ¹⁴⁷ In this act of humiliation He was exalted through His Resurrection. ¹⁴⁸

The priest, as *alter Christus*, another Christ, must always be aware of his obligation to unite himself to Jesus, the humble Servant. As the priest bows before the altar to pray the prayer of humility, all who worship God 'in spirit and in truth, ¹⁴⁹ do well to ask for the grace to grow in humility, the foundation of all other virtues.

- 142 Daniel 3:39-40
- 143 Euchology, The Sunday Synaxis, 1
- 144 St John Chrysostom, Homily 33 on St John
- 145 St Augustine, Letter 145
- 146 Pope Bl John XXIII. Journal of a Soul, written 1954, 1957
- 147 cf Philippians 2:8
- 148 cf Acts 2:33-36
- 149 John 4:23

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Incensation (A sign of our worship)

*The pure prayer that ascends from a faithful heart
will be like incense rising from a hallowed altar.
No fragrance can be more pleasing to God
than that of His own Son.
May all His faithful people exude the same sweet fragrance.*

-On Psalm 140:6



May my prayer arise before You like incense, the lifting of my hands like the evening oblation. ¹⁵⁰

At the end of each day of worship in the Temple of Jerusalem, after the many sacrifices of animals, birds and foodstuffs had been burnt on the great altar that stood before the Holy of Holies, the priests offered incense on a special golden altar. This last sacrifice of the day, offered in the presence of thousands of worshipping Jews, produced a fragrant cloud that reminded them of God's presence centuries earlier during their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land: *The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day.* ¹⁵¹

Incense is a powerful symbol. As it rises, the smoke of the incense enhances the aspiration expressed by the gaze of those who are at prayer. ¹⁵² *We ourselves are gifts offered to God; the ascending incense is an image of our own self-surrender ... When the congregation stands for the incensation, it is a sign that we are raising ourselves up, because our hearts are directed upward, like the incense rising to heaven.* ¹⁵³

The first Christians did not use incense. For the followers of Jesus who lived in Jerusalem, the offering of incense was part of Temple worship, and was not connected with the Breaking of the Bread celebrated in homes. For Christians in other places, incense was connected with the worship of pagan deities. In fact, the burning of incense has been used by nearly every world religion as a way of designating something or someone as being sacred.

When Christianity was legalised by Constantine in 313, the Church was given the right to adopt the civil honours given to officials of the state. One of these was the burning of incense in a brazier which was carried before a senator or magistrate as he entered a basilica, originally a public hall. This became the custom at the entrance of bishops into basilicas that had been converted into churches. It was also used during the Gospel Procession. By the 7th century, Rome had adopted the Eastern custom of incensing the gifts on the altar. And by the 14th century, the rite of incensation was fully developed with a blessing of the incense, incensation of the gifts and altar with accompanying prayers and complex gestures, and finally the incensation of the clergy and people.

Priest and people are called to be holy: *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart.* ¹⁵⁴ In the liturgy God is to be honoured by the body of the faithful, and the faithful are to derive sanctification from this act of worship. ¹⁵⁵

During the incensation of the gifts, priest and people, our interior prayer can be similar to these words from the early Church: *Let your sacrifice be spotless and pleasing to God, Who has said of His ecumenical Church: In every place I am offered incense and a pure offering. For I am a great King, says the Lord Almighty, and My Name is wonderful among the nations.*¹⁵⁶

75. The priest may incense the gifts placed upon the altar and then incense the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church's offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God. Next, the priest, because of his sacred ministry, and the people, by reason of their baptismal dignity, may be incensed by the deacon or another minister.

150 Psalm 141:2

151 Exodus 13:21

152 cf Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*

153 Bernhard Kleinheyer, *op cit*, 167

154 1 Peter 2:9, cf Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 43:20-21, Malachi 3:17

155 Romano Guardini, *op cit*, 141

156 The Apostolic Constitutions VII, 30, 1-2

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Lavabo (Clean inside and out)

*The Psalmist says, "I will wash my hands among the innocent,
and I will go about Your altar, O Lord."
He means that we must purify all our actions among God's people,
and when we come to the altar,
we must wash our hands with which we shall embrace His glorious gifts.*

-- On Psalm 26:6



76. The priest then washes his hands at the side of the altar; a rite that is an expression of his desire for interior purification.
145. ... The priest washes his hands standing at the side of the altar and, as the minister pours the water, says quietly: *Lava me, Domine* (Lord, wash away my iniquity ...).

Every part of the body is an expressive instrument of the soul. The soul does not inhabit the body as a person inhabits a house. It lives and works in each member, each fibre, and reveals itself in the body's every line, contour and movement. But the soul's chief instruments and clearest mirrors are the face and hands. ¹⁵⁷

The washing of the hands of the priest is a simple rite, so simple that some priests mistakenly omit it, thinking that it is unnecessary.

It is a silent rite, pertaining to the priest alone and therefore not proclaimed aloud, yet it is performed in full view of the assembly so that all can observe it.

It is an ancient rite, its roots being in pre-Christian religions and Old Testament Judaism, but it speaks to the heart of modern humanity.

The washing of hands is also known as the *Lavabo* from the first Latin word of the sixth verse of Psalm 26, which accompanies this rite in the Missal of Bl. John XXIII: *I will wash my hands among the innocent*. The Missal of Paul VI indicates a different text, Psalm 51:2, cited above.

Water purification was an important feature of Judaism. The Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, nevertheless submitted to a rite of purification before presenting the Child Jesus in the Temple. Removing her garments, she submerged herself in one of the women's *mikveh* or baths outside the Temple, then put on a special robe, her 'Temple garment', before joining St Joseph and entering the Temple courtyard.

Jesus, together with Mary and Joseph, would have washed his face, hands and feet each morning and evening before reciting His prayers. Likewise, like all practising Jews, they would have washed before saying grace and eating their meals.

Our Lord criticised the Pharisees for being more concerned about washing their cups and plates than about having pure hearts. ¹⁵⁸

In his account of the Last Supper, St John makes a point of Jesus taking upon Himself the service of washing the feet of His disciples. Certainly this washing served a practical purpose, since people wore open sandals and walked in dusty roads. However, this washing was part of the spiritual preparation for the Passover, a meal that was accompanied by many prayers. Thus St Peter,

reprimanded by Our Lord for his false pride in refusing to have his feet washed by his Master, not only acquiesces but says that Jesus can perform all three ritual washings: *"Then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well."* ¹⁵⁹

The priest who has a sense of his own unworthiness before the Lord, and a 'desire for interior purification', performs it devoutly as a witness to his people. Like St Peter, the priests of the Lord Jesus should humble themselves in preparation for the sublime sacrificial act they are about to perform, desiring not only to wash their hands as the Church prescribes, but 'hands and feet as well' - in other words, to be entirely cleansed from sin.

157 Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* pp 15-18

158 cf Matthew 23:25-26

159 John 13:9

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Invitation to the Eucharist (Orate, Fratres)

*The Lord Himself commands the guests
to be invited to His great Supper. . .
For the Supper of the Lord is the unity of the Body of Christ,
not only in the Sacrament of the Altar,
but also in the bond of peace.*

- Against the Donatists 6:22, 24



146. Upon returning to the middle of the altar, the priest, facing the people and extending and then joining his hands, invites the people to pray, saying: *Orate, fratres* (Pray, brethren). The people rise and make their response: *Suscipiat Dominus* (May the Lord accept . . .).

In the liturgy of the ancient Roman Rite, the bishop said a prayer over the bread and wine once they were placed on the altar, and then he immediately began the Eucharistic Prayer. But around the 700s, in the Frankish countries (modern France, Germany and surrounds) we find an invitation to pray. Sometimes this was addressed quietly to the ministering clergy, but sometimes it was spoken aloud to the entire assembly. At first, silence was the expected response. Then a variety of spoken responses were devised, until about the 11th century when the response we now use was generally accepted.

The priest invites us to pray, but specifically that the sacrifice being offered to the Father will be acceptable. This can serve to remind us that there are times when people offer an *unacceptable* sacrifice to God. Recall Cain's offering, for which God "had no regard." ¹⁶⁰ At times, God rejected the sacrifice of the priests in the Temple of Jerusalem: "*I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.*" ¹⁶¹ And so St Paul appeals to Christians to "*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, as your spiritual worship.*" ¹⁶²

The early Church understood the importance of making a worthy and acceptable offering. In one of her early liturgies, she prayed thus: *Make this Church to be living and pure, grant her to possess divine powers, to have at her service the pure angels, so that she may be able to celebrate You purely.* ¹⁶³

The people make a detailed response to the priest's invitation to pray, asking that (1) the Lord accept the sacrifice (2) which is being offered through the anointed hands of the priest (3) for the praise and glory of God's Name, (4) for our own good (5) as well as for the good of the entire holy Church of God.

As the priest invites us to join him in the sacrificial act, the entire assembly stands to signify its assent to this act of worship, and its readiness to give thanks and praise to God. In this desire to offer an acceptable sacrifice, the prophecy of Malachi finds its fulfillment: *For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My Name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered in My Name, and a pure offering.* ¹⁶⁴

160 cf Genesis 4:5

161 Malachi 1:10

162 Romans 12:1

163 Euchology, The Sunday Synaxis, 10

164 Malachi 1:11

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Prayer over the Gifts



The Prayer over the Gifts evolved from a spoken prayer to being prayed very quietly, probably due to Byzantine influence and the desire to introduce more reverence into what was becoming a very wordy liturgy. For centuries, then, this Prayer over the Gifts was called the 'Secret', meaning it was prayed quietly rather than proclaimed aloud.

Now this prayer has been given back its original name and character. The text of the Prayer over the Gifts often echoes the words of the preceding invitation to prayer: *Pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father*. It is often related to the liturgical celebration of the day or season, and asks God to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

All of these thoughts, all of our anticipation of the Eucharist, are gathered together in both our response to the priest's invitation to pray, and in the Prayer over the Gifts which he offers on behalf of us all. With our *Amen*, we are ready to enter into the Eucharistic Prayer. We pray that we, along with the

elements of the sacrifice, will be changed and transformed to become the Mystical Body of Christ, as St Paul reminds us we truly are called to be: *Now you are Christ's Body, and individually parts of it.* ¹⁶⁵ With St Therese of the Child Jesus, we say: *Our only duty is to become united to God.* ¹⁶⁶

*The Prophet Malachi foresaw the Church which we now see spread worldwide by and through Christ, saying,
'From the rising of the sun to its going down,
My name is great among the nations;
And in every place sacrifice shall be made,
And a pure oblation shall be offered unto My Name;
For My Name shall be great among the nations,
Says the Lord.'* Mal 1:10-11

We can already see this sacrifice offered to God in every place, from the rising of the sun to its going down, through Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek."

– *The City of God* 18:35

146. Then the priest, with hands extended, says the Prayer over the Offerings ...

77. The people, uniting themselves to this entreaty, make the prayer their own with the acclamation: *Amen* ... Once the offerings have been placed on the altar and the accompanying rites completed, the invitation to pray with the priest and the Prayer over the Offerings conclude the Preparation of the Gifts and prepare for the Eucharistic Prayer.

165 1 Corinthians 12:27

166 Sr Geneviève of the Holy Face (Celine Martin), *My Sister Saint Thérèse*, p 99

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Eucharistic Prayer (Sursum corda) - We raise our hearts on high

*Lift up your heart
so that it will not rot on earth.
This is the advice given by Him
Who wishes not to destroy, but to save.*

— Sermon 60:7



78. Now the centre and summit of the entire celebration begins, namely, the Eucharistic Prayer; that is, the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving.

Let the deacons present the offering to (the bishop). When he lays his hands on it, with the whole college of priests, let him say the words of thanksgiving: The Lord be with you. And with your spirit. Let us lift up our hearts. They are turned to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is worthy and just. ¹⁶⁷

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a dialogue known as the *Sursum corda* (Latin for 'Lift up your hearts.') This expression is hard to translate; it actually means something closer to 'Hearts on high!'

Likewise, the people's response, *Habemus ad Dominum*, 'We lift them up to the Lord,' is more accurately rendered 'We have them before the Lord.' For obvious reasons, our English translation is a bit different, while helping us understand the sense of the Latin.

St Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) was a bishop and teacher of the Faith who delivered a series of sermons, known as The Catechetical Lectures, to catechumens and the general Christian population of his city, for which he will forever be famous. Here is what he says about the *Sursum corda*:

The priest cries out, 'Lift up your hearts!' For in this most solemn hour it is necessary for us to have our hearts raised up with God, and not fixed below on the earth and earthly things. It is as if the priest is instructing us to dismiss all physical cares and domestic anxieties, and to have our hearts in heaven with the benevolent God. Then you answer, 'We lift them up to the Lord.' In other words, you give assent to what the priest has said by the acknowledgement that you make. Let no one come here, then, who could say, 'We lift them up to the Lord,' whilst being preoccupied with physical cares. ¹⁶⁸

In other words, when we enter the moment of the Eucharist, we transcend our earthly lives, and 'earth is joined to heaven'. Human time ceases, and we join the heavenly court in the eternal moment of thanks to God. For that is what the Greek word *eucharistia* means: giving thanks.

St Cyril continues: *Then the priest says, 'Let us give thanks to the Lord.' Certainly we ought to give thanks to God for having invited us, unworthy as we are, to so great a gift. We ought to give thanks to God for reconciling us to Himself when we were His enemies. We ought to give thanks to God for having made us His adopted children by the Spirit.*

Then you say, 'It is right and just.' For in giving thanks, we do a worthy thing, something that is justice itself. But what God did in accounting us worthy of such benefits was not justice, but much more than just. ¹⁶⁹

This dialogue is present in all traditional Eucharistic Prayers of all rites, attesting to its antiquity and importance. *Lift up your heart* is an expression

found in Scripture: *Let us stretch out our hearts and hands to God in heaven.* ¹⁷⁰
And that is our purpose at Mass: to reach out to God, to touch heaven, to move beyond earthly cares and communicate with our Father Who loves us, knows our needs, and wants to 'lift all things to Himself.'

This is God's plan for us: that we should yearn for eternal life at every Eucharist, at every celebration of this 'foretaste of future glory'. ¹⁷¹

Indeed, let us lift up our hearts and turn them toward God, that His face may shine upon us as we come into His presence.

167 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 36: Anaphora

168 St Cyril of Jerusalem, The Catechetical Lectures, no. 848d

169 ibid, no. 848e

170 Lamentations 3:41

171 St Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers of Corpus Christi

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Preface (A reason to pray)

*My God,
let me remember You with thanksgiving
and proclaim Your mercies to me.*

• Confessions B1



79 a. In the Preface, the priest, in the name of the entire holy people, glorifies God the Father and gives thanks for the whole work of salvation or for some special aspect of it that corresponds to the day, festivity, or season.

Let the bishop continue thus: We give You thanks, O God, through Your beloved Child, Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent to us in the last times as Saviour, Redeemer and Messenger of Your will. He is Your inseparable Word through Whom You have created all things and in Whom You are well pleased. You sent Him from heaven into the womb of a Virgin. He was conceived and became incarnate, He manifested Himself as Your Son, born of the Spirit and the Virgin. He accomplished Your will and, to acquire a holy people for You, He stretched out His hands while He suffered to deliver from suffering those who believe in You ... ¹⁷²

The Eucharistic Prayer is not primarily a prayer of petition or of contrition, or even of praise. All of those motives of prayer enter into it; but the main thrust of the Eucharistic Prayer is thanksgiving: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

Those words come to us from the Jewish invitation to prayer at the blessing of the cup of wine, both at Passover and at the weekly Sabbath meal. In fact, the whole concept of offering '*a sacrifice of thanksgiving*' is directly borrowed from the Jewish concept of *berekah*.¹⁷³ This was a long prayer enumerating God's many blessings upon Israel, accompanied by a sacrificial offering: an animal, bird or cereal sacrifice, or bread and wine at a ritual meal.

'Preface' comes from a Latin word which means 'a proclamation in the presence' of God and His people. Every ancient Eucharistic prayer (or *anaphora*, Greek for 'offering') begins with a Preface - a reason for praising God's work of creation and redemption. In the Eastern Churches, the Preface is usually quite long and comprehensive, and is fixed rather than changeable.

The Roman rite, however, has always had a variety of Prefaces. The Roman Missal now has over eighty individual Prefaces for feast days, liturgical seasons, votive Masses and special occasions. Each one is a relatively concise statement of praise that is addressed to God the Father through Christ His Son.

Eucharistic Prayers I (the Roman Canon) and III do not have proper Prefaces of their own. Prayer II has a special Preface, but others may be substituted for it. Prayer IV, however, is based on the Eastern model and has a longer Preface, a beautiful poem of praise and thanks, which must always be used with it since the thematic development begun in it continues beyond the *Sanctus* (Holy).

Ideally, the Preface is sung, which then leads naturally into the singing of the people's acclamation *Holy, holy, holy*. But even if it is recited, the structure of the Preface is such that it builds to a dramatic climax: *And so, with angels and archangels and the whole company of saints, we sing the unending hymn of Your praise*. If it is declaimed properly, the people will be led into their response in a way that truly underscores their thanks to God for all He has given us in Christ.

Yes, it is right to give Him thanks and praise.

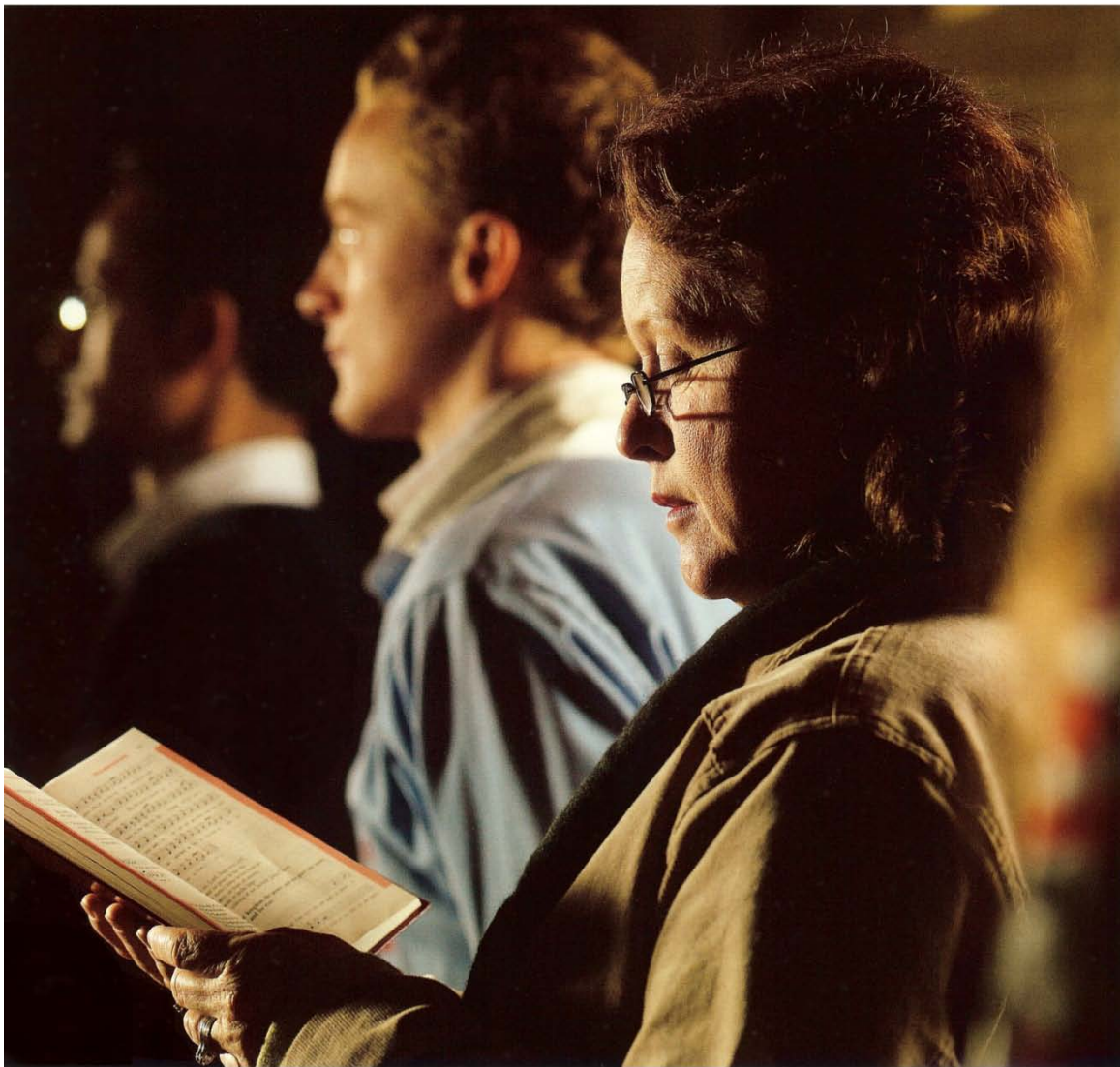
172 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 6: Anaphora

173 cf Leviticus 7:12-13; Psalm 107:22, 116:17; Amos 4:5

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Sanctus (Holy, holy, holy)

*Love sings now;
in heaven, too, it is love that will sing.
But now it is a yearning love that sings;
then, it will be an enjoying love.*

-- Sermon 254:6



79 b. The whole congregation, joining with the heavenly powers, sings the Sanctus. This acclamation, which is part of the Eucharistic Prayer itself, is sung or said by all the people with the priest.

*You are attended by thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads of Angels and Archangels, of Thrones and Dominations, of Principalities and Powers. Beside You stand the two august Seraphim with six wings: two to cover their face, two to cover their feet, two with which to fly. They sing Your holiness. With theirs, accept also our acclamation of Your holiness: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are filled with Your glory. The heaven is filled, the earth is filled with Your wonderful glory!*¹⁷⁴

The Prophet Isaiah (born c 765 B.C.) was about twenty-five when he received his prophetic calling whilst in the Temple of Jerusalem: *In the year of King Uzziah's death (740 B.C.), I saw the Lord God seated on a high throne. The train of His robe filled the sanctuary. Above Him stood seraphs, each one with six wings: two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying. And they cried out one to another in this way: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with His glory."*¹⁷⁵

The Hebrew word for 'holy', *kadosh*, means 'separate'. The person who wants to be holy must be separate from others, different from those who persist in their sin. God Himself is separate from His creatures by virtue of His transcendent majesty and glory.

He is not human but divine, the Most High, the All-Holy.

Ancient Hebrew had no way to express the degrees of an adjective (e.g., holy, holier, holiest) other than to repeat the word. So we imitate the Hebrew style in saying that God is 'holy, holy, holy'.

The first Christians, who were themselves Jews, joined in the daily morning synagogue chant, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory!"* But as an acclamation to conclude the Preface, the *Sanctus* was first used in Alexandria, Egypt some time before 230 A.D., spreading from there to all of Christendom.

The Preface leads to the *Sanctus*, with its evocation of "angels and archangels and all the hosts of Heaven'. While the priest speaks *about* God in the Preface, the whole assembly takes its cue and sings directly to God in an exultant acclamation of praise.

God Himself comes to us in the divine Person of Jesus Christ, made present in the Eucharist. We announce this imminent Real Presence with another verse from Scripture: *Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord!"*¹⁷⁶ Jesus Himself prophesied: *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! ... Yes, I promise you, you shall not see Me till the time comes when you say: 'Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! '"*¹⁷⁷

Both the *Sanctus* and the *Benedictus* ('Blessed is He') conclude with *Hosanna in the highest!* 'Hosanna' is a Hebrew invocation that means 'Save, we ask you!'

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, many Jews were expecting Him to take advantage of the multitude gathered for Passover to lead an uprising against the Romans. Their acclamation, "*Hosanna in the highest!*" was a cry for help: "We ask You, save us - really!" (i.e., 'in the highest').

Acclaiming God as All-Holy reflects His call to us: "*Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.*" ¹⁷⁸ With Christians of every generation in history, we eagerly await the coming of the Lord Jesus into our midst and cry out, "*Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!*"

174 Euchology, Prayer of the Anaphora, 13

175 Isaiah 6:1-5

176 Psalm 118:26

177 Luke 13:34-35

178 Leviticus 19:2

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: Praise of the Father

You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and infinite is Your wisdom. We want to praise You — we who are just a tiny part of Your creation! You awaken us to find joy in Your praise, for You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in You.

— Confessions 1:1



(The presider) takes them (the bread and cup of wine) , gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe through the Name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then makes a long eucharist (thanksgiving) for having been judged worthy of these good things. ¹⁷⁹

As with so many other aspects of Catholic liturgy, the Eucharistic Prayer is closely connected with traditions of Judaism. The *berakah*, the table prayers and blessings required at every Jewish meal, was adapted by early Jewish Christians for use at the Eucharist.

During the Last Supper, Jesus "*took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying ...* "

It is important to understand that the Institution Narrative, which is the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer, is not a 'script' to be acted out at that moment. The priest does not break the Host when the text says '*broke it*', just as he does not immediately begin distributing Holy Communion when the text says '*and gave it to His disciples*'.

Those four verbs - took, blessed, broke, gave - are a compressed summary of the entire Eucharistic action. They describe the four principal actions of the sacrificial act of the Mass:

He took the bread - the Preparation of the Gifts, where the elements for the sacrifice are brought to the priest, who takes them and places them on the altar;

He blessed it - the Eucharistic Prayer, modeled after the Jewish prayer of blessing, during which the priest consecrates the gifts;

He broke it - the Breaking of the Bread, where the priest prepares the consecrated Body and Blood of the Lord for sharing with the faithful;

He gave it - Holy Communion, where the priest administers the Eucharistic gifts to the participants in the sacrifice.

The Eucharistic Prayer, including the Consecration with its Institution Narrative, is not directed toward the people at all. Rather, the priest leads the people in directing the prayer to God the Father.

Dialogue between priest and people is central to the action during the Liturgy of the Word. And in the course of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, such as the end of the Preparation of the Gifts ("*Pray, my brothers and sisters* ") and at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer ("*The Lord be with you ... Lift up your hearts Let us give thanks ...* ") the priest directly addresses the people.

But other prayers are directed to the Father: *"Blessed are You, Lord, God of all creation ... Lord, we ask You to receive us ... Lord, wash away my iniquity ... Father, all-powerful and ever-living God ... Holy, holy, holy Lord ... Lord, You are holy indeed ... All glory and honour is Yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever."*

The Eucharistic Prayer in particular is not directed toward the people, but to God the Father. The words and actions of this moment of the Mass are not spoken to the people but, with eyes uplifted, are addressed to God our heavenly Father.

Thus the Church reminds us: *In these prayers the priest, while he performs the commemoration, turns toward God, even in the name of the whole people, renders Him thanks and offers the living and holy Sacrifice, redemption namely, the Church's offering and the Victim by whose immolation God willed to be appeased; and he prays that the Body and Blood of Christ may be a sacrifice acceptable to the Father and salvific for the whole world.*¹⁸⁰

78. The priest unites the congregation with himself in the Prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of sacrifice. The Eucharistic Prayer demands that all listen to it with reverence and in silence.

179 Justin 24-5

180 GIRM, Preamble, no 2

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Epiklesis (Calling down the Spirit)

*Understand now what Your Apostle Paul says:
"The love of God has been poured into our hearts
by the Holy Spirit."*

- Confessions 7:8



79 c. In the Epiklesis, by means of particular invocations, the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ's Body and Blood, and that the spotless Victim to be received in Communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it.

The Greek word *epiklesis* means 'to invoke, to call down upon.' For ancient pagans and Christians alike, it signified the invoking of a name. Thus the words of Baptism are an epiklesis, as are other sacramental formulae where the Persons of the Trinity are invoked over a person.

In all forms of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Epiklesis is evident because of the priest's gesture. From the *orans* or praying position with his hands outstretched, he lowers his hands and holds them, palms down, over the bread and wine as he makes the invocation: Then he makes a Sign of the Cross over the gifts with his right hand.

The liturgies of the early Church testify to the importance of the Holy Spirit's action in the Eucharist: *And so we beg You to send Your Holy Spirit upon the offering of Your Holy Church, to gather and unite all those who receive it. May they be filled with the Holy Spirit Who strengthens their faith in the truth. So may we be able to praise and glorify You through Your Child Jesus Christ.* ¹⁸¹ And again: *Send down upon this sacrifice Your Holy Spirit, "witness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus"* ¹⁸² *that He may make this bread the Body of Your Christ, and this cup the Blood of Your Christ.* ¹⁸³

In the liturgical theology of the Eastern Churches, the Epiklesis is the moment when the bread and wine become the Lord's Body and Blood, and it comes as a conclusion to the Institution Narrative (the words describing what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper). In the tradition of the West, the Institution Narrative itself is the focal moment of consecration. But both East and West agree that both Epiklesis and Institution Narrative are essential parts of the Eucharistic Prayer.

How did this difference of emphasis arise? Theologians in the West, beginning with St Ambrose (340-397) stressed the importance of the words of Institution, and other theologians followed suit. But the Greeks reacted to certain heretical tendencies that attacked the divinity of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity, and placed emphasis on the distinct action of the Spirit in sanctifying both the gifts and the people.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit is not simply an expression of the love between the Father and the Son, but is a distinct and divine Person of the Blessed Trinity.

For centuries, the difference between the Eastern and Western approach to the Epiklesis caused no great difficulties. In the Middle Ages, the tendency of some Western theologians to try to pinpoint the actual 'moment' of the Consecration became a point of controversy, not only between East and West, but within the Western Church itself.

Today it is commonly agreed that the entire Eucharistic Prayer is consecratory, and that the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is essential. The Eucharistic Prayer is a unified whole - one Prayer, and not a series of individual prayers.

There are two points in the Eucharistic Prayer when the Holy Spirit is invoked. The first is before the Consecration, when the focus is on the gifts to be consecrated: But there is also a second aspect of the Epiklesis that invokes the Spirit again after the Consecration. This invocation asks that all who partake of the Eucharist be made one in Christ.

This is the true richness of the Eucharistic mystery: through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given the grace-filled opportunity to be set apart as God's holy People, to be transformed, to be Christ's living presence in the world.

181 St Hippolytus, loc cit

182 cf 1 Peter 5:1

183 The Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 12, 29

The Eucharistic Prayer: **The Consecration of the Host (Bread becomes Christ's Body)**

*"Lord, You bring forth bread from the earth."
What bread? Christ.
He is the Bread Who came down from heaven,
that He might be brought forth out of the earth,
from the Apostles and their successors
who still walk upon the earth.*

- On Psalm 104:19



79 d. By means of words and actions of Christ, the Sacrifice is carried out which Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to his Apostles to eat and drink, and left them the command to perpetuate this same mystery.

That the Mass is a sacrificial action is revealed, among other ways, in a small gesture. When the priest pronounces the Institution Narrative, at the words *"He took the bread and gave You thanks,"* he takes the bread and lifts it a little above the altar. This is an ancient gesture, a 'little elevation' which goes back to the Paschal meal rituals which are still used by Jews today. The head of the household lifts the bread and cup a little while speaking the words of blessing. It seems well established that this gesture is one of offering, since the Paschal supper was both a ritual feast and a sacrificial meal.¹⁸⁴

And in the Mass, the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present and shared. Recall how, after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes for the multitude, He preached a beautiful discourse about the Bread of life: *"My Flesh is true food, and My Blood is true drink. Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood remains in Me and I in Him ... whoever eats this Bread will live for ever."*¹⁸⁵ The people abandoned Jesus, saying that His teaching was too hard to accept. Jesus did not try to modify His words; He remained firm, and even gave His disciples the opportunity to leave as well.¹⁸⁶

This fact confirms that Jesus meant what He said: He gives us His own true Body and Blood under forms of bread and wine. *"This is My Body, Which will be given up for you." What has happened? For almost 2000 years people have prayed and probed and fought over the meaning of these words. They have become the sign of a community that is holier, more intimate than any other, but also occasion for the most profound schisms. Hence, when we ask what they mean, let us first be clear as to how they should be taken. There is only one answer: literally. The words mean precisely what they say. Any attempt to understand them "spiritually" is disobedience and leads to disbelief. It is not our task to decide what they should mean in order to express "pure Christianity," but to accept them reverently as they stand, and to learn from them what Christian purity is.*

*When Jesus spoke and acted as He did, He knew that all He said and did was of divine importance. He wished to be understood, and spoke accordingly. The disciples were no symbolists, neither were they 19th or 20th century conceptualists, but simple fishermen much more inclined to take Jesus' words literally than spiritually. Even generally speaking, the man of antiquity was accustomed to perceiving and thinking through the evidence of his senses rather than abstractly. As to Christ's gestures, every detail of these men's lives was saturated with cult, and they were accustomed to reading truth from sign and symbol. Aware of all this, the Lord yet spoke and acted as He did.*¹⁸⁷

These words clearly express Catholic faith in the doctrine of transubstantiation, i.e. *that the whole substance of bread is changed into the substance of the Body of Christ ... This change is brought about in the Eucharistic Prayer through the efficacy of the word of Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit. However, the outward characteristics of bread and wine, that is, the 'Eucharistic species', remain unaltered.*¹⁸⁸

Thus it is with true faith that Catholics adore Christ present in the Eucharist. With St Thomas the Apostle, who once doubted but then believed, we look at the sacred Host and say, *"My Lord and my God!"*¹⁸⁹

184 cf Romano Guardini, Sacred Symbols 134

185 John 6:55-56, 58

186 cf John 6:60-68

187 Romano Guardini, The Lord, pp 368-373

188 Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 283

189 John 20:28

The Eucharistic Prayer: The Consecration of the Chalice (Wine becomes Christ's Blood)



*"And wine to gladden our hearts."
If the excellent Cup of the Lord runs over and fills you,
it shall be seen in your works,
it shall be seen in your holy love of righteousness,
it shall be seen, lastly, in the conversion of your mind
from earthly things to those that are heavenly.*

Jesus takes the chalice and blesses it; and what He hands them is no longer only the sacred drink offering of the Pasch, but the mystery of the New Covenant just established. And all that takes place is not only the celebration of one high, fleeting hour; it is a sacred rite institutional for all time and constantly to be renewed until God's kingdom comes, and the Lord Himself celebrates it again with His own in the unveiled glory of the new creation. ¹⁹⁰

When the Jewish people celebrate Passover, they are not simply remembering a historical event. Through the retelling of the story of their deliverance, and the use of ritual foods and actions that illustrate that wondrous story, the past becomes present. The Passover is now: *"This is the night when our ancestors were delivered from bondage"* ¹⁹¹

Because we live in human time, *chronos* as the Greeks call it, we forget that God exists beyond time. He is not bound by clocks and calendars; He lives in *kairos*, the 'eternal now'. For God there is no past or future, only the present moment. Thus, His knowledge of the future is not some kind of foretelling; God knows the future simply because the future is present to Him now.

Similarly, past events are not over and done for God; they go on, because the past is also present to Him. Thus the saving Death and Resurrection of Christ are an ongoing event, ever present to God - and ever present to His Church. Again, *it is a sacred rite institutional for all time and constantly to be renewed until God's kingdom comes, and the Lord Himself celebrates it again with His own ...* ¹⁹²

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The Victim is one and the same: the Same (Christ) now offers through the ministry of priests, Who then offered Himself on the Cross; only the manner of offering is different." ¹⁹³ No, Jesus is not dying again and again in every Mass; He died once for all. ¹⁹⁴ But His death is an act of self-offering that transcends space and time. It happened once in history, ¹⁹⁵ but it is spiritually renewed in every re-presentation because the Risen Christ lives a life that is beyond human history.

"In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ Who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner." ¹⁹⁶ No, animals are not slain and blood is not sprinkled upon a people waiting to be forgiven. We have been redeemed by the saving Blood of Christ, and that grace is available to all. But it is up to each individual to claim that redemption by accepting a share in the Cross, dying to sin and living the risen life of the Saviour.

"This ... shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution." ¹⁹⁷ In the Mass, the memorial feast of our liberation from slavery to sin and death is truly a perpetual institution. Christ has shed His precious Blood for the forgiveness of our sins: come, let us adore Him!

3. The wondrous mystery of the Lord's real presence under the Eucharistic species, reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and other documents of the Church's Magisterium in the same sense and with the same words that the Council of Trent had proposed as a matter of faith, is proclaimed in the celebration of Mass not only by means of the very words of consecration, by which Christ becomes present through transubstantiation, but also by that interior disposition and outward expression of supreme reverence and adoration in which the Eucharistic Liturgy is carried out.

- 190 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp 368-373
- 191 cf the Easter Exsultet
- 192 Romano Guardini, *loc cit*
- 193 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1367, Council of Trent (1562): DS 1740;
cf 1 Corinthians 11:23; Hebrews 7:24, 27
- 194 cf Romans 6:10
- 195 Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 450, 668
- 196 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1367; Council of Trent (1562): DS 1743;
cf Hebrews 9:14, 27
- 197 Exodus 12:14

The Eucharistic Prayer: **The Memorial Acclamation (We proclaim the Mystery of Faith)**

*By dying, Christ showed what you are going to endure,
whether you wish to or not.
But by rising from the dead, He showed what you also will receive
if you lead a good life.*

- Sermon 279:9



We announce Your death we proclaim Your resurrection, and we pray ... ¹⁹⁸

The Greek word *mysterion* denotes something 'seen through squinting'; it is visible, but not clearly. St Paul says that "*at present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror.*" ¹⁹⁹ Ancient mirrors were not as clear as ours; yet by looking into a mirror, the ancients could see a fairly good reflection of reality.

Thus to say that we deal with 'sacred mysteries' ²⁰⁰ when we celebrate the liturgy does not mean that we are entering into rites that are impossible to comprehend. But at the same time they are beyond us in the best sense, because they transcend human space and time. The liturgy opens the door to the eternal.

*In the holiest part of the Mass, in the midst of the transubstantiation, the Church herself rings out the words, *mysterium fidei*! Where is the impenetrability of divine mystery more apparent than here? Let us respect it rather than attempt to explain. Leaving the "how" in all the density of its mystery, let us inquire only into the "what".*

What, then, is the Eucharist? It is Christ in His self-surrender, the eternal reality of the suffering and death of the Lord immortalised in a form that permits us to draw from it vitality for our spiritual life as concrete as food and drink from which we draw our physical strength.

Let this stand as it is. Any attempt to "spiritualise" or "purify" it must destroy it. It is presumption and incredulity to try to fix the limits of the possible. God says what He wills, and what He wills, is. He alone, "to the end", sets the form and measure of His love (Jn 13: 1) ...

It is certain that the disciples did not grasp the full meaning of what their Lord had done. But it is equally certain that they did not interpret it merely as a symbol of community and surrender, or an act of commemoration and spiritual intervention, but rather along the lines of the first Passover in Egypt, of the paschal feast they had just completed, and of the sacrificial rite celebrated day after day in the Temple. What had happened? Theology is constantly wrestling with the answer; yet one cannot avoid the feeling that this part of its effort has remained singularly unsuccessful. Perhaps it is just as well. .. ²⁰¹

The mystery of faith is the Paschal Mystery: Christ dying, rising and present amongst His people. It is the complete plan of God the Father, now realised in Christ's saving love. ²⁰² Just as the reasons why people fall in love are often a mystery to all but those who love, so the Eucharistic Mystery is incomprehensible except to those who have discovered the love of Christ for us.

2. The sacrificial nature of the Mass, solemnly declared by the Council of Trent in accordance with the Church's universal tradition, was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which offered these significant words about the Mass; 'At the Last Supper our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood, by which He would perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, thus entrusting to the Church, His beloved Bride, the memorial of His Death and Resurrection.

15.1 After the Consecration when the priest has said; *Mysterium fidei* (Let us proclaim the mystery of faith), the people sing or say an acclamation using one of the prescribed formulas.

198 from an ancient Christian liturgy

199 1 Corinthians 13:12

200 cf introduction to the Act of Penitence in the Mass

201 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp 368-373

202 cf Ephesians 1:9

The Eucharistic Prayer: **The Anamnesis (Remembering what Christ has done for us)**

It is plain enough to see that the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection is a figure of the death of our old sinful life, and our rising to new life. Here is shown forth the abolition of iniquity and the renewal of righteousness, through the faith given us by Jesus Christ.

— On Christ the True Healer 10



79 e. The Church, fulfilling the command that she received from Christ the Lord through the Apostles, keeps the memorial of Christ, recalling especially his blessed Passion, glorious Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven.

We, then, remembering Your death and Your Resurrection, offer bread and wine. We give You thanks for having judged us worthy to stand before You and serve You ... ²⁰³

The entire Eucharistic Prayer, with the consecratory words of institution at its centre, is a memorial, a remembering (*zikkaron* in Hebrew, *anamnesis* in Greek) that is so powerful that it actually makes present God's saving deeds in Christ. Thus their fullness and power are not left behind in history, but are present and take their effect here and now.

From earliest times, the Church has expressed the implications of Christ's command to "*do this in memory of Me*" ²⁰⁴ by a special prayer called the *Anamnesis* which expresses in clear language the meaning of the Eucharistic memorial. It is a statement that links the act of consecration to the act of offering in one sacrificial action: "Remembering ... we offer ... "

In our various forms of the Eucharistic Prayer, the wording of the *Anamnesis* varies. But it always embraces the full Paschal Mystery, calling to mind Christ's Passion and Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension into glory and His return at the end of time.

This last article of faith is often overlooked, yet it is of utmost importance. It is proclaimed in the Nicene Creed: *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.* It is proclaimed in the Memorial Acclamations that prepare the way for the *Anamnesis*. And it is the continuing faith of the Church: *The Church celebrates the mystery of her Lord "until He comes," when "God will be everything to everyone." Since the apostolic age, the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit's groaning in the Church: "Marana tha!" The liturgy thus shares in Jesus' desire: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you ... until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."* ²⁰⁵

Our remembering is a window into God's *kairos*, bringing both past and future together into the present moment. We recall Christ's death and resurrection - past events that have effected our salvation. But we also recall Christ's *parousia*, His return in glory – the future event that will reveal *that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by His creatures, and that God's love is stronger than death.* ²⁰⁶

Sharing in the Eucharist, we share in Christ's mission of justice and love. Each celebration of the Mass should instill in us a sense of urgency to unite ourselves more intimately to the Lord Jesus in His suffering and death by our own struggle to conquer selfishness. Then, as we rise with Him in triumph over sin by dying to ourselves, we can look forward, not in fear, but "*with joyful hope to the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*" ²⁰⁷

203 St Hippolytus, loc cit

204 cf words of Consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer; cf also 1 Corinthians 11:24-25; 22:19

205 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1130, cf 1 Corinthians 11:26; 14:28; 16:22; Revelation 22:20; Luke 22:15; Marana tha! means "Come, Lord Jesus!"

206 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1040; cf Song of Songs 8:6

207 cf conclusion of the Embolism of the Mass

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: **The Prayer for the Clergy**

*"Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labour in vain," declares the Psalmist.
Who are those who labour to build it?
All those who in the Church preach the word of God:
the ministers of God's sacraments.*

- On Psalm 126:1



79 g. Expression is given to the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the entire Church.

The Jewish *berakah* or prayer of blessing over the cup included various formulas asking God to show mercy upon the People of Israel, to send Elijah and the Messiah, and to restore the House of David. In line with this tradition, the Eucharistic Prayer includes intercessions for various groups of people: the bishops and clergy, all the faithful, and the departed.

In the Church of Alexandria in Egypt, these intercessions were prayed before the consecratory Institution Narrative, while at Antioch they were inserted after the *Anamnesis* and post-consecratory *Epiklesis*. The Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer 1) includes intercessions before and after the Consecration, while the other Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman rite follow the Antiochene tradition and place all the intercessions toward the end.

In the Patristic Era, deacons would announce the names of the living and dead to be remembered in prayer, reading them from *diptychs*, two wooden tablets hinged together. The name of the Bishop of Rome was included in all churches at that time, as well as the name of the local bishop. It was, and still is, a serious obligation to pray for the Pope and the local bishop during the Eucharistic Prayer: *Let us all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows His Father, and the college of presbyters as the apostles. Respect the deacons as you do God's law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop ... without the bishop there is no Eucharist.* ²⁰⁸

The early Church also prayed faithfully for the bishop's assisting clergy: *We call on You, Saviour and Lord, God of all flesh and Lord of every spirit, You who are blessed and do dispense all blessing: make holy our bishop ... we pray You too for those who are priests with him ... make the deacons holy, too ...* ²⁰⁹

It is most fitting and appropriate that we pray in a special way for our bishops and clergy during the Eucharistic Prayer. After all, it was in the company of the Twelve that Jesus instituted the Eucharist we celebrate, and it was to them that He entrusted the power to continue His sacrificial act "until He comes again." This has been the consistent faith of the Church from ancient times: *Jesus gave (the apostles) this command: "Do this in memory of Me." And it was to them alone that He gave these words.* ²¹⁰

It was the feet of His first priests, the Apostles, that Jesus washed as a reminder of their call to service before He gave us this Mystery of faith. ²¹¹ *The bishop and priests sanctify the Church by their prayer and work, by their ministry of the Word and the sacraments. They sanctify her by their example, "not by domineering over those in their charge but being examples to the flock." Thus, "together with the flock entrusted to them, they may attain to eternal life."* ²¹²

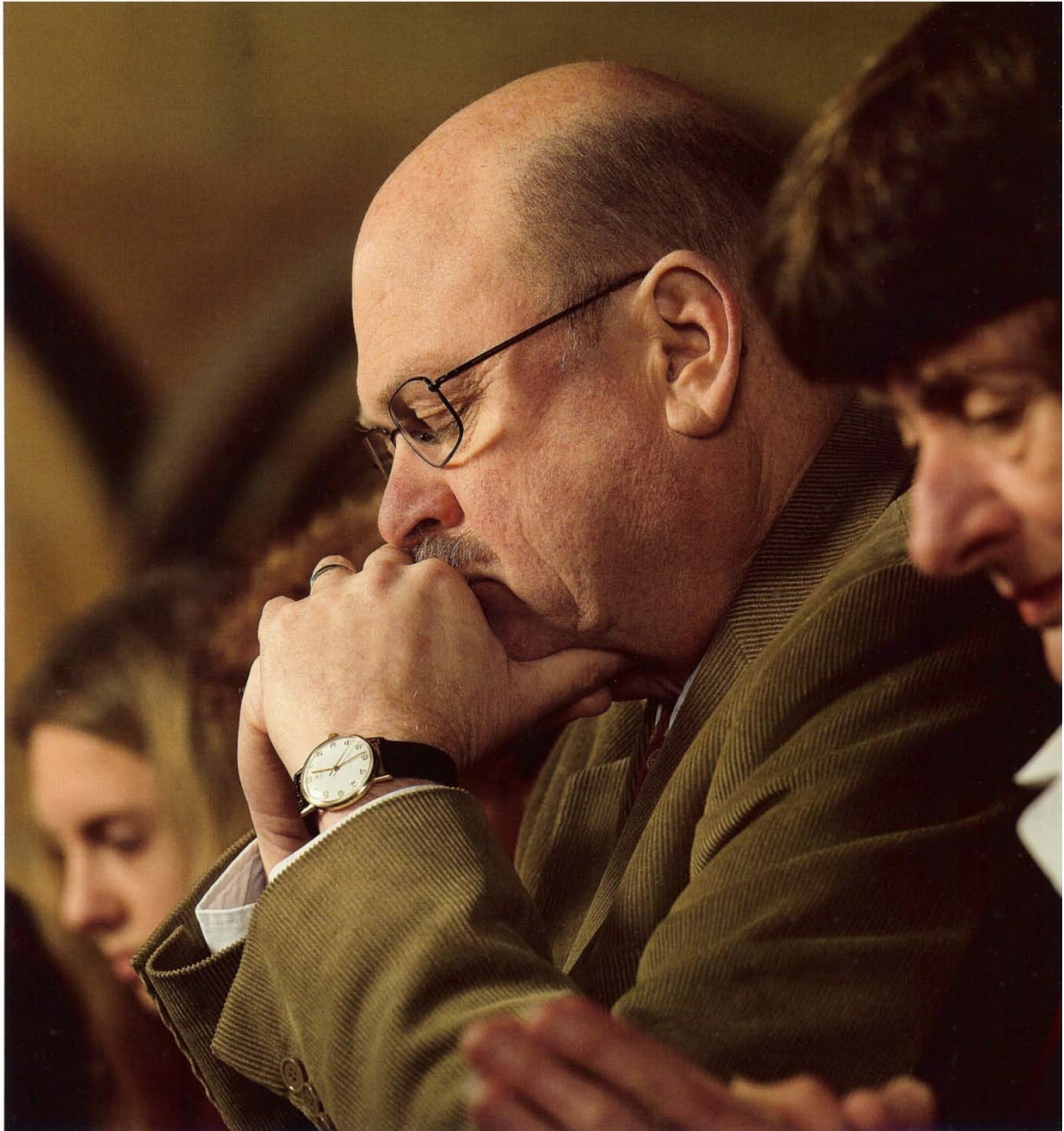
Theirs is an awesome privilege but also a weighty responsibility, and so at this moment we remember them in our prayers: our Holy Father the Pope, our local Bishop, and all the clergy.

- 208 St Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Church of Smyrna, 8:1
- 209 Euchology, The Sunday Synaxis, 11
- 210 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65-66
- 211 cf John 13:1-17
- 212 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 893; cf 1 Peter 5:3; Lumen Gentium 26:3

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: **The Prayer for the Faithful Departed**

*The souls of our beloved dead are not separated from the Church,
which even now is the kingdom of Christ;
otherwise there would be no remembrance made of them at the altar of God
in the partaking of the body of Christ.*

-- The City of God 9:13:66



79 g. . . . the offering is made for the Church and for all her members, living and dead, who have been called to participate in the redemption and the salvation purchased by Christ's Body and Blood.

The *diptychs* were typical writing tablets of the classical age: wooden boards with one side covered with wax, upon which names could be etched (or erased) with a stylus. They were hinged together so that they could be closed to protect the writing. One board contained the names of the living, the other held the names of the dead.

After announcing the names of the bishop and clergy, a deacon would say something similar to this prayer from an ancient Christian liturgy: *We pray You, too, for all the dead who have fallen asleep, whom we call to mind. (After recalling the names:) Sanctify these souls, for You know them all. Sanctify those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Number them with Your holy Powers, give them a place and a dwelling in Your Kingdom.* ²¹³

Having requested the help of the unifying Spirit, the worshipping assembly petitions the Father that salvation and mercy be granted, not only to those present, but to all the members of the Church, including the dead. In so doing, we unite ourselves to Christ Who *lives for ever to make intercession.* ²¹⁴

That this intercession includes the departed is a constant teaching of the Church: *From the beginning, the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the Beatific Vision of God.* ²¹⁵

During a Mass being offered in particular for the dead (a funeral Mass, or a Mass on the anniversary of a death), the name may be mentioned by the priest. But it is recommended that those present at Mass silently name those they wish to include in this intercession for the faithful departed. In this way we enter more personally into the Eucharistic Prayer and make it our own. We come closer to the reality that at Mass we have "one foot on earth, and the other in eternity." St John Chrysostom fervently recommends this: *Let us help and commemorate the dead. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died, and to offer our prayers for them.* ²¹⁶



- 213 Euchology, Prayer of the Anaphora
- 214 Hebrews 7:25
- 215 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1032; cf Council of Lyons II (1274): DS 856
- 216 St John Chrysostom, Homily on 1 Corinthians 41:5

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Invocation of Mary and the Saints

*Can anyone doubt that the Lord will share His life with the saints
when He has already given them His death?*

- Sermon 218c:1



The liturgy reaches beyond the bounds of time to this extent: that the body which is praying on earth knows itself to be at one with those for whom time no longer exists, who, being perfected, exist in eternity. ²¹⁷

The Eucharist is *the pledge of future glory*.²¹⁸ It is right, then, that the Church on earth, the "Church Militant", also recalls during its Eucharistic Prayer the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles, the Martyrs and all the Saints who already share in the heavenly Banquet announced and prefigured by the Eucharist. We pray: *Make us worthy to share eternal life with ... all the saints who have done Your will throughout the ages. May we praise You in union with them, and give You glory through Your Son, Jesus Christ.*²¹⁹

In fact, the Church in Heaven, the "Church Triumphant" is present with us as we pray, encouraging us who are on earth to persevere in our Christian calling until we, too, attain eternal life with God: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us, and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader of faith and the One Who makes it perfect.*²²⁰

This prayerful union with the saints in Heaven is, again, a way in which the Church expresses its willingness to leave earthly time, *chronos*, behind while we participate in Christ's sacrifice, and enter into God's eternal *kairos*. We acknowledge that although the saints of the past may be invisible to us at present, they are very much alive in Christ and with us in the unity of God's people. *In the glory of Heaven, the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other people and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with Him "they shall reign for ever and ever."*²²¹

The patron saint of a place, and a saint being commemorated on a particular date in the liturgical calendar, may be mentioned by name in the Mass. They and all the rest of the saints in Heaven surely join St Therese of the Child Jesus in her firm promise: *"I will spend my Heaven doing good upon the earth."*²²² Indeed, the saints *share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today. They contemplate God, praise Him, and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were "put in charge of many things." Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.*

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- 217 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp 141-149
- 218 St Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers of Corpus Christi
- 219 Eucharistic Prayer II
- 220 Hebrews 12:1
- 221 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1029; cf Revelation 22:5; Matthew 25:21, 23
- 222 St Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*
- 223 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2683; cf Matthew 25:21

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: **The Prayer for Us All**

*There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love,
we shall love and praise.*

*And then, what will be at the end without end?
For what other end do we have in life,
if not to reach the Kingdom which has no end?*

• The City of God 22:30:5



79 f. In this very memorial, the Church – and in particular the Church here and now gathered – offers in the Holy Spirit the spotless Victim to the Father. The Church's intention, however, is that the faithful not only offer this spotless Victim but also learn to offer themselves, and so day by day to be consummated, through Christ the Mediator, into unity with God and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all.

Accept the thanksgiving of Your people. Bless those who have presented to You these offerings and thanksgivings. Give all this people health, prosperity and happiness, all good things of soul and body. ²²⁴

Intercessions for the bishops and clergy, for the faithful departed, and the invocation of the saints, culminate in our petition to *have mercy on us all.* ²²⁵ The entire Church – in Heaven, on earth and in Purgatory - is bound together in the Communion of Saints. All of us form one Body in Christ; all of us participate in the liturgy together.

The liturgy is not celebrated by the individual, but by the body of the faithful. This is not composed merely of the persons who may be present in church; it is not just the assembled congregation. On the contrary, it reaches out beyond the bounds of space to embrace all the faithful on earth ... The faithful are actively united by a vital and fundamental principle common to them all. That principle is Christ Himself; His life is ours, we are incorporated in Him, we are His Body, the Mystical Body of Christ. The active force which governs this living unity, grafting each individual onto it, granting them a share in its fellowship and preserving this right for them, is the Holy Spirit. Every individual Catholic is a cell of this living organism or a member of His Body. ²²⁶

Praying with and for one another is an expression of faith that we are truly one Body. If we believe in *the life of the world to come,* ²²⁷ and if we subscribe to the belief that through the liturgy the future becomes present to us, then Heaven touches earth during Holy Mass, and we are not cut off from those who have preceded us into eternity. And we are linked to members of the Church in every place on earth.

The Roman Canon says it well: *Remember, Lord, Your people, especially those for whom we now pray ... Remember all of us gathered here before You. You know how firmly we believe in You and dedicate ourselves to You. We offer You this sacrifice of praise for ourselves and those who are dear to us. We pray to You, our living and true God, for our well-being and redemption. In union with the whole Church ...* ²²⁸

The Greek word *catholikos*, 'catholic', means 'universal'. This means that the Church is present in all lands, in all places, and in all times - past, present and future. In the words of an ancient liturgy: *As this Bread was scattered on the mountains, the hills and in the valleys, and was gathered to become a single Body ... as too this Wine, sprung from the holy vine of David, and this water,*

sprung from the spotless Lamb, were mixed and became a single Mystery, so too do You gather the catholic Church of Jesus Christ. ²²⁹

- 224 Euchology, Prayer of the Anaphora, 13
- 225 Eucharistic Prayer II
- 226 Romano Guardini, op cit, pp 141-149; 1918; cf Romans 12:4 ff; Ephesians 1-4; Collosians 1:15 ff; et al
- 227 Nicene Creed
- 228 Eucharistic Prayer I
- 229 Der Balyzeh manuscript, 192

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Final Doxology (A final word of praise)

*We pray through Christ, with Christ, in Christ.
We pray along with Him, and He prays along with us.*

On Psalm 85:1



The conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer as we pray it today finds its origin in one of the Church's earliest liturgies, the Eucharistic Prayer of St Hippolytus (upon which our Eucharistic Prayer II is partly based): *Through Him, glory to You, and honour, to the Father and to the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in Your holy Church, now and for ever. Amen.* ²³⁰

The Final Doxology summarises the Eucharistic Prayer, which ends, as it began, on a note of praise: *All glory and honour is Yours.* The text is Trinitarian, being directed to the *almighty Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.* And it emphasises Christ - *through Him, with Him, in Him* - in His role as Mediator: *For there is one God. There is also one Mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, Himself human, Who gave Himself as ransom for all.* ²³¹

Christ is the High Priest Who is truly present in the sacrificial memorial. It is Christ Who offers Himself to the Church's faithful.

The Church, in its turn, unites itself in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the epiphany of Christ's Body, both sacramental and ecclesial.

The priest lifts the consecrated elements, raising them on high in a final gesture of offering to God the Father. *The 'great' elevation first appears in the Middle Ages and is connected with the question that was debated at that time, namely: At exactly what point in the Eucharistic Prayer did the change in the elements take place?* ²³² Obviously, having such a dramatic elevation at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer underscores the Church's faith that the entire Prayer as a whole is a prayer of consecration, the heart and summit of the Eucharistic celebration. ²³³

It is the priest alone (or concelebrating priests together) who proclaims the Final Doxology, ²³⁴ just as the priest alone prays aloud the Trinitarian conclusions of other prayers (Collect, Prayer over the Gifts, Prayer after Communion).

As in all other prayers of the Mass, the people give their assent according to ancient tradition: *When he has finished, all the people present acclaim it (the Eucharistic Prayer), saying: "Amen". Amen is a Hebrew word which means: so be it.* ²³⁵ St Augustine once remarked that the people in his cathedral, the *Basilica Pacis* in Hippo, North Africa, would sing the Great Amen so loudly and strongly that he was sometimes afraid the roof would collapse! ²³⁶

An assembly conscious of its spiritual reality as the Body of Christ, hierarchically ordered amongst its clergy and laity, will pray "through, with and in Christ" and assent to His one perfect sacrifice, like St Augustine's people, with a resounding acclamation: *Amen*.

79 h. The glorification of God is expressed and is confirmed and concluded by the people's acclamation: Amen

230 St Hippolytus, loc cit

231 1 Timothy 2:5-6a

232 Bernhard Kleinheyer, *The Meaning of the Sacramental Symbols*, p 87

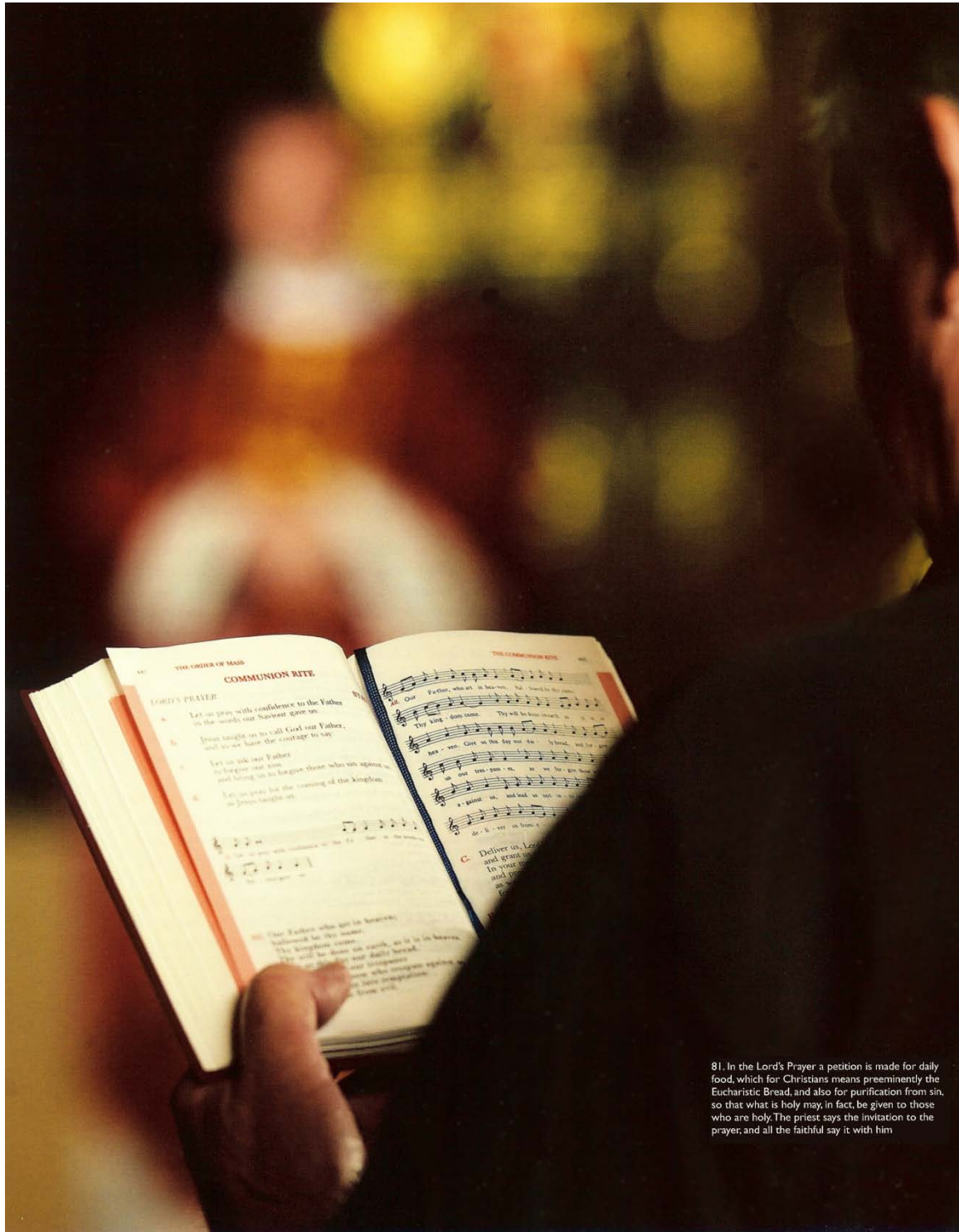
233 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1352

234 cf GIRM no. 151

235 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65

236 St Augustine, *Sermons*

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Lord's Prayer (Pater Noster)



81. In the Lord's Prayer a petition is made for daily food, which for Christians means preeminently the Eucharistic Bread, and also for purification from sin, so that what is holy may, in fact, be given to those who are holy. The priest says the invitation to the prayer, and all the faithful say it with him.

Within the context of the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer was originally prayed immediately after the Breaking of the Bread. The influence of St Augustine's (354-430) teaching caused Pope St Gregory the Great (r 590-604) to relocate it to its present place, linking it closely to the Eucharistic Prayer.

Two versions of the Lord's Prayer are found in the Gospels: Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-13. The latter is the one that now enjoys a unique place in Christian spirituality and worship. The early Christians prayed it three times a day, ²³⁷ in place of the Eighteen Benedictions customary in Jewish piety.

Just as the Eucharistic Prayer is a unified whole consisting of various prayers, intercessions and acclamations, so the Lord's Prayer includes a prefacing address (*Our Father Who art in Heaven*), acclamations (*Hallowed be Thy Name! Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!*) and petitions (*Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*).

The first part of the prayer follows well from the Final Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, whilst the second part, which speaks of bread and forgiveness, looks ahead to Holy Communion. ²³⁸

It is a communal prayer, essentially rooted in the liturgy: *"The Lord teaches us to make prayer in common for all our brethren. For He did not say 'My Father Who art in Heaven,' but 'our' Father, offering petitions for the common Body."* ²³⁹

It is an ideal prayer of preparation for Communion, which we share as sisters and brothers. *Jesus once warned against domination in any form: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi'; for one is your Master, and all of you are brothers." This is the beginning of the Christian 'we.' The faithful are to be bound to each other in mutual fraternity. They are the family of God, in which all are brothers and sisters and one with the Father. St Paul completes the thought with great depth and beauty when he calls Christ 'the firstborn among many brethren.'* *The communal spirit finds expression in the ethos of the Sermon on the Mount; in the Our Father it crystallises into prayer.* ²⁴⁰

When Moses came upon the Burning Bush, he was told: *"Do not come near. Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* ²⁴¹ In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus grants us access to His Father as our own: *"Here I am - I and the children God has given me."* ²⁴² The priest at Mass invites us, then: *"Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Saviour gave us."* ²⁴³

Finally, the Lord's Prayer, as another anamnesis, remembers the eschatological concept of the Kingdom present-and-yet-to-come. It is the prayer of a people who celebrate *the mystery of salvation already accomplished, once for all, in Christ Crucified and Risen.* ²⁴⁴ It is truly *the most perfect of prayers.* ²⁴⁵

"Run through all the words of the holy prayers in Scripture, and I do not think that you will find anything in them that is not contained and included in the Lord's Prayer." ²⁴⁶

Before you approach the altar, note well what you say:

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

If you forgive others, God will forgive you.

- On John's Gospel 26:1

237 cf Didache 8:3

238 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2770

239 St John Chrysostom, Homily on Matthew 19:4

240 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp 238-242; 1937; cf Matthew 23:8-12; Romans 8:29

241 Exodus 3:5

242 Hebrews 2:13b; Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2777

243 introduction to the Lord's Prayer at Mass

244 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2771

245 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1-11, 83, 9

246 St Augustine, Letter 130:12, 22

THE COMMUNION RITE: **Libera Me** (Deliverance from evil, deliverance into the Kingdom)

*Eat the Bread of heaven in a spiritual way.
Come to It freed from sin.
Even though your sins occur daily,
at least see to it that they be not mortal.*

- On John's Gospel 26:11



81. The priest alone adds the Embolism, which the people conclude with a Doxology. The Embolism, enlarging upon the last petition of the Lord's Prayer itself, begs deliverance from the power of evil for the entire community of the faithful.

In the early Church liturgical document, the *Didache*, we find this prayer: *Remember, Lord, Your Church, to deliver her from all evil, to make her perfect in Your love. Gather her from the four winds, this Church You have sanctified, into the Kingdom You have prepared for her. For power and glory are Yours for ever. Amen.* ²⁴⁷

The final petition of the Lord's Prayer, *Deliver us from evil*, is followed by an expansion of this request. Thus this prayer is known as the Embolism, from the Greek word for "insertion". It would seem, from the prayer quoted above from the *Didache*, that early forms of the Embolism date from the Christian liturgies of the first century.

The Embolism prays for peace, previewing the prayer for and sign of peace. It asks that we be kept free from sin and protected from all anxiety, evoking the Lamb of God Who takes away our sins and grants us peace. It affirms us as a Church awaiting the coming of our Lord and Saviour, repeating the eschatological acclamation of God's Kingdom.

This last statement leads into an acclamation by the people: *For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours, now and for ever!* The acclamation was sometimes inserted into the text of the Scriptures in various places, especially at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, by pious manuscript copyists. This practice is perhaps due to the influence of the Byzantine liturgical tradition, which deemed the acclamation a more positive conclusion to the Lord's Prayer than *Deliver us from evil*. Because the acclamation was found in some ancient bible manuscripts, Protestant scholars of the Reformation era considered it a part of the Lord's Prayer itself. It has become famous in its King James Version translation as *For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever! Amen.*

For centuries, this acclamation was never a part of Catholic liturgical tradition, nor was it in use everywhere in the Eastern Churches. St Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Catechetical Sermons preached in the year 350, comments on the Lord's Prayer, petition by petition. After speaking about *Deliver us from evil*, he says: *"Then, after the prayer has been completed, you say: 'Amen.'"*

However, the spirit of ecumenism which swept through the Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council influenced those charged with liturgical renewal to insert the acclamation, not at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer itself, but at the end of the Embolism. The Embolism itself ends with words from St Paul's

Letter to Titus: ... *as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory ... of our Saviour Jesus Christ.* ²⁴⁸ The acclamation is a fitting way to complete the Embolism, echoing the early words of the Lord's Prayer: *Thy Kingdom come!*

247 Didache

248 Titus 2:13

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Prayer for Peace

*Let all live together in harmony and love,
and honour God in each other,
because you have become His temples.*

Rule for Monasteries 2



82. The Rite of Peace follows, by which the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family.

When the Risen Christ appeared to His disciples in the Upper Room, He said to them, *"Peace be with you."* ²⁴⁹ The Hebrew word *shalom*, which Jesus would have used as His greeting, is a wish that a person experience all possible prosperity. It is the state of a person who lives in complete harmony with nature, self and God. It is a call to reconciliation, unity and communion.

Jesus' greeting of peace would have reminded the Apostles of His words to them in that same Upper Room only a few days earlier, on Holy Thursday: *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives peace do I give it to you."* ²⁵⁰

How does the world give peace? By signing treaties to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, by drawing lines of demilitarisation, by declaring temporary periods of cease-fire. And people can breathe more easily - for a while.

But the Church teaches that *peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of power between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is 'the tranquility of order'. Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.* ²⁵¹

Jesus' intention is clear: there is a direct connection between the Eucharist and peace. His greeting to His disciples, offered on Easter Sunday evening when He had accomplished our redemption through His dying and rising, was the fulfilment of His promise of peace made when He prayed His 'Priestly Prayer' at the Last Supper. If our Eucharistic assembly is truly a gathering in fraternal charity, then peace must be the fruit of that charity. ²⁵²

Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, the messianic 'Prince of Peace.' By the Blood of His Cross, "in His own person He killed the hostility", He reconciled humanity with God and made His Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. ²⁵³

Charity produces peace, and peace brings forth unity. As we move toward the moment of Holy Communion, the priest prays a prayer for peace. He echoes the words of the Priestly Prayer of Christ, and then he asks the Lord not to consider our sins but rather to consider our faith, and grant us peace and unity.

Receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion requires that we be in 'communion' with the Lord. This spiritual communion is a threefold task:

- 1) accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, confessing and repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Him;
- 2) acknowledging and living according to His teachings, which have been entrusted to the Church which He founded;
- 3) making peace with our brothers and sisters.

The first two tasks of 'communion' are liturgically celebrated in the Act of Penitence and the Profession of Faith. The third, the task of peace, is addressed in the Prayer for Peace and the subsequent exchange of the Sign of Peace.

St Paul says of Christ: "*He is our peace.*" ²⁵⁴ And Jesus Himself counsels us to be serious about the task of peace: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" ²⁵⁵ It is in His Kingdom of unity and peace that He lives for ever and ever. If we want to join Him in that Kingdom, then we must join Him in the work of peace.

249 Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21

250 John 14:27

251 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2304; cf St Augustine, *The City of God*, 19, 13, 1; Isaiah 32:17; *Lumen Gentium*, The Constitution of the Church, 78:1-2

252 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1829

253 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2305; cf Isaiah 9:5; Ephesians 2:16

254 Colossians 1:20-22

255 Matthew 5:9

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Sign of Peace

Immediately after the Our Father, the words "Peace be with you" are said.

A great sacrament lies in this kiss of peace, so let your kiss be the expression of a true love.

Do not be Judas!

He kissed Christ with his lips, while in his heart he was already plotting against Him.

-- Sermon against Dionysius 6:3



82. The faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament. It is, however, appropriate that each person offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner: . . . The most common form of the gesture of peace is the handshake, although different practices according to region and culture are not excluded

The bishop then greets the assembly, saying: "The peace of God be with you all." The people reply: "And with thy spirit." The deacon then says to all: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." The clergy then give the kiss of peace to the bishop, laymen give it to laymen, and women to women. ²⁵⁶

Originally the greeting of peace was exchanged before the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as a conclusion to the General Intercessions: *When the prayers are finished, we give each other the kiss of peace.* ²⁵⁷ Then the Eucharistic gifts were brought forward. This was to relate the Sign of Peace to the words of

Jesus in the Gospel: *"If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

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The transfer of the greeting to the point just before Communion began in North Africa and extended throughout the West in the 4th and 5th centuries. Pope Innocent I (d 417) defended its new location *"as a sign of the people's acquiescence in all that has been done in these mysteries."* ²⁵⁹ This is because the kiss of peace was seen by early Christians as a seal placed on prayer, like an 'Amen'. Today this connection has been lost, and the focus at this moment in the sacred liturgy is on peace, reconciliation and unity.

But Jesus Himself gives yet another emphasis: deliverance from fear. *"Peace be with you!"* was the greeting given by the Risen Lord on the evening of the day of His resurrection to the disciples who were gathered behind closed doors *"for fear of the Jews."* ²⁶⁰ It is the salvation promised in this greeting that has the power to deliver the community from fear and to make possible its mission to the world. *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* ²⁶¹ Being a Christian, then, means being gifted with the peace of God, being called to obtain God's salvation, and so to proclaim this peace to the world. ²⁶²

The Sign of Peace has varied in form. Early Christians exchanged the 'kiss of peace', an embrace of greeting akin to that exchanged by most southern Europeans and Middle Eastern people. In medieval England, parishioners would kiss a *pax brede* or 'peace board' – a small tablet of wood or metal that was kissed by the celebrant and then passed around the congregation. For a time, the Sign of Peace was shared only amongst the clergy at a solemn Mass. In our time, this gesture takes the form of the Western handshake, the Eastern bow, or the liturgical embrace.

It is the custom in both Eastern and Western liturgical traditions that the people remain in their places and exchange this greeting with their immediate neighbours, following the priest's greeting of the entire assembly, *"The peace of the Lord be with you always"* and their response. Special occasions such as weddings or funerals provide for the priest exchanging the Sign of Peace with a few individuals in addition to the liturgical ministers. However, for him to leave the altar and attempt to greet as many as possible needlessly accentuates his own role and obscures the understanding of Christ's presence in the entire assembly as the people share His peace.

The Sign of Peace is a 'seal' which ratifies not only the Eucharistic Mystery, but the mystery of the Eucharistic assembly whose members find Christ and His peace in their love for one another.

256 The Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 11, 7-9

257 cf Didache; St Justin Martyr, op cit

258 Matthew 5:23-24

259 Pope Innocent 1, Letters Vol 2: to Decentio Augubino 1:4

260 John 20:19

261 John 20:21

262 cf Bernhard Kleinheyer, op cit, p 136

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Breaking of Bread (Agnus Dei)



The early Church prayed: *We give You thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that You have revealed to us through Jesus, Your Child. Glory to You for ever! Just as this bread which we break, once scattered over the hills, has been gathered and made one, so may Your Church too be assembled from the ends of the earth into Your Kingdom. For glory and power are Yours for ever.* ²⁶³

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and then broke it. In so doing He was following the rite of the Passover celebration. Ever since then, the Breaking of the Bread has been the most important action preparatory to the distribution of the Eucharist. The symbolism already attached to this gesture in Judaism is essential: through eating the one Bread, broken into pieces and distributed to all, the table fellowship comes into existence. In this way, it is a sharing in the Body of Christ.

Anyone who has been present when a large Host is broken to be shared by all who are participating in that Mass will have found it easier to understand the meaning of this rite. It is clear at such celebrations why the early Church referred to the whole liturgy as 'the Breaking of the Bread.' ²⁶⁴

Over the centuries, as the people's sense of their own unworthiness led them to refrain from frequent reception of the Eucharist and the priest was often the only person who received Communion, the significance of this rite was greatly diminished. Today, with the majority of the assembly sharing in the Eucharist, it is important that this rite regain its proper place and easily be seen by the people, without being exaggerated or prolonged.

In the early Church, as an original community grew, making it impossible for everyone to attend one Mass with the bishop, pieces from his Host (the Eucharistic Bread, so-called from the Latin word *hostia*, or 'victim') were taken by acolytes to the new communities (what we know today as 'parishes'), placed under the leadership of presbyters ordained by the bishop. Upon receiving the particle (called the *fermentum* or 'leaven') of the Eucharist, the local presbyter would put it into the chalice containing the Precious Blood, signifying the community's unity with the bishop.

In addition to its meaning as a sign of table fellowship and Church unity, the Fraction also signifies the Resurrection of Christ and our share in His risen life. Note that the bread and wine are consecrated separately, reminding us of the death of Jesus when His side was pierced with a lance "*and immediately blood and water flowed out.*" ²⁶⁵ In the Fraction rite, the fermentum put into the

Precious Blood symbolises the reunion of Christ's soul and body in the Resurrection. The priest prays: *May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.* ²⁶⁶

The litany, "*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world*" with its responses, "*have mercy on us ... grant us peace*" is meant to accompany this rite, not follow it. It serves as a link between the Sign of Peace and the Invitation to Holy Communion, which begins immediately at the litany's conclusion. And it underscores the Passover connection of the Breaking of the Bread, reminding us that "*we were ransomed ... with the precious Blood of Christ as of a spotless, unblemished Lamb.*" ²⁶⁷ Every Eucharist is a memorial of the new Passover of Christ Who brings us forgiveness, mercy, and peace.

83. The priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread, assisted, if the case calls for it, by the deacon or a concelebrant. Christ's gesture of breaking bread at the Last Supper, which gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name in apostolic times, signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life which is Christ, who died and rose for the salvation of the world ... This rite is reserved to the priest and the deacon.

The priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the Host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the living and glorious Body of Jesus Christ. The supplication *Agnus Dei* is, as a rule, sung by the choir or cantor with the congregation responding; or it is at least recited aloud. This invocation accompanies the Fraction and for this reason may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has reached its conclusion, the last time ending with the words: *dona nobis pacem* (grant us peace).

321. The meaning of the sign demands that the material for the Eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food. It is therefore expedient that the Eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful. Small hosts are, however, in no way ruled out when the number of those receiving Holy Communion or other pastoral needs require it. The action of the Fraction or Breaking of Bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, will bring out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one Bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters.

*The Disciples did not recognise Christ until He broke the bread.
Indeed, if you do not eat and drink judgment upon yourself in the
Breaking of Bread, you, too, will know Christ.*

- 2nd Homily on John 2:1

- 263 Didache
- 264 cf Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 5:7
- 265 John 19:34
- 266 prayer from the Fraction rite
- 267 1 Peter 1:18-19

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Prayer before Holy Communion

*All who eat the Lord's Flesh and drink His Blood
must consider what they eat and drink.
To avoid eating and drinking unto condemnation,
let them live well.*

- Sermon 132:1



84. The priest prepares himself by a prayer, said privately, that he may fruitfully receive Christ's Body and Blood. The faithful do the same, praying silently.

Let the bishop say: We entreat You again, almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: grant us to receive this holy Mystery with blessing. Do not condemn anyone among us. Let all those who receive this holy Mystery be made worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ, almighty Lord, our God. Let the deacon say: Pray. Let the bishop say: Almighty God, make us to be strengthened by receiving Your holy Mystery. Let it not condemn anyone among us, but bless us all through Christ. Through Him, glory to You and power, now and always, and for all eternity. Amen. ²⁶⁸

Various devotional prayers for the priest to say quietly before receiving Holy Communion developed in the Middle Ages, principally in France. These prayers were directed to Christ, present on the altar in the Eucharist, and were intended to support the personal piety of the priest celebrant. Eventually three of these prayers were selected for use in the 1570 Missal of Pope St Pius V.

One of the prayers is now used as the Prayer for Peace before the exchange of the Sign of Peace. The other two prayers remain, with the priest permitted to pray his choice of one or the other. They are beautiful prayers, whose sentiments are in keeping with those of the ancient prayer quoted above. Here are their texts:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, Your death brought life to the world. By Your holy Body and Blood free me from all my sins and from every evil. Keep me faithful to Your teaching, and never let me be parted from You.

Lord Jesus Christ, with faith in Your love and mercy I eat Your Body and drink Your Blood. Let it not bring me condemnation, but health in mind and body.

The idea of 'condemnation' may seem harsh and out of place to some. But it is a reflection of St Paul's warning to the Church in Corinth: *"A person should examine himself, and so eat the Bread and drink the Cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body, eats and drinks a condemnation unto himself."* ²⁶⁹

Priests, as local leaders of the Christian community, have a special obligation to maintain unity of heart and mind with their bishops. *The promise of obedience they make to the bishop at the moment of ordination, and the kiss of peace from him at the end of the ordination liturgy, mean that the bishop considers them his co-workers, his sons, his brothers and his friends, and that they in turn owe him love and obedience.* ²⁷⁰ Priests are also called to teach their people how to pray, not only by word but more importantly by example. When the people see that their priest demonstrates his own Eucharistic faith by his devout celebration of the sacred mysteries and especially by quietly communing with God in his own heart, even in brief moments such as this, they are inspired to be more devout and prayerful themselves. In this way, priest and people are prepared for a fruitful encounter with Christ in Holy Communion.

268 St Hippolytus, op cit, 43-4

269 1 Corinthians 11:28-29

270 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1567

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Invitation to Holy Communion



84. The priest next shows the faithful the Eucharistic Bread, holding It above the paten or above the chalice, and invites them to the banquet of Christ. Along with the faithful, he then makes an act of humility using the prescribed words taken from the Gospels.

Jesus describes Heaven as a wedding banquet to which many are invited. However, not all are prepared to enter the banquet hall because they are not appropriately dressed, i.e., they are not living in God's grace. Still others decline to attend at all, because they are busy doing other things. Our Lord concludes his parable with this quiet observation: *Many are invited, but few are chosen.* ²⁷¹

A formal invitation to receive the Lord's Body and Blood is found in nearly every ancient liturgy. The invitation used in many Eastern Churches is *Holy things to the holy!* In other words, only those who are sincerely trying to live holy lives should approach the altar. Others are welcome, but they should first repent, availing themselves of the Sacrament of Penance, before receiving Holy Communion.

This has been the teaching of the Church since apostolic times. ²⁷² In the past, many interpreted this to mean that they should receive Communion rarely, or not at all. This was partly due to an exaggerated sense of unworthiness, but it was also a problem caused by spiritual apathy on the part of some. Rather than repent and live the Gospel life, they simply chose to remain in their sin. They came to Mass, perhaps because of family or social expectations, but they did not receive Communion because they knew they were not spiritually ready.

Spiritual apathy is still a problem today, a lack of real interest in living the life of the Gospel. Yet nearly everyone receives Holy Communion, even though they rarely, if ever, receive sacramental absolution and reconciliation with the Church. This is not spiritually helpful to them.

The Church does not teach that only the perfect may share in the Eucharist; no one of us is yet perfected. But some may ignore the need for spiritual discernment that St Paul says is necessary if we are going to receive worthily and avail ourselves of the grace offered in the Eucharist. The first step on the road to recovery from spiritual blindness is an admission of our own need for change:

There are two ways of coming to God: through the preservation of innocence, and through the loss of it.

Some have come to God because they were good, like Mary, who was "full of grace"; like Joseph, the "just man"; like Nathaniel, "in whom there was no guile"; or like John the Baptist, "the greatest man ever born of woman".

But others have come to God who were bad, like the young Gerasene man "possessed of devils"; like Magdalen, out of whose corrupt soul the Lord had cast seven devils; and like the thief who spoke to Jesus at the Crucifixion.

The world loves the mediocre. The world hates the very good and the very bad. The good are a reproach to the mediocre, and the evil are a disturbance." ²⁷³

Sinners who came to Jesus recognised their need to change, and change they did. Before Holy Communion, we repeat the words of the Roman centurion who was aware of his own unworthiness. ²⁷⁴ Once he recognised the power of Jesus to heal and to save, Jesus was willing and able to work the wonders of His grace.

Jesus does not exalt the mediocre; on the contrary, He reproves and chastises, calling us to repentance because He loves us. ²⁷⁵ Nor does He force His way into our hearts; He stands at the door and knocks. ²⁷⁶ To open the door to Jesus means acknowledging our need for a Saviour, i.e., admitting our own sinfulness and unworthiness. *Lord, I am not worthy ...*

271 cf Matthew 22:1-14

272 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1385

273 Michael Dubruiel, *Praying in the Presence of Our Lord* with Fulton J Sheen, p 82

274 cf Matthew 8:5-13

275 cf Revelation 3:14-19

276 cf Revelation 3:20

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Priest's Communion (Christ's Body, broken for us)

He lies in the manger, but contains the world.

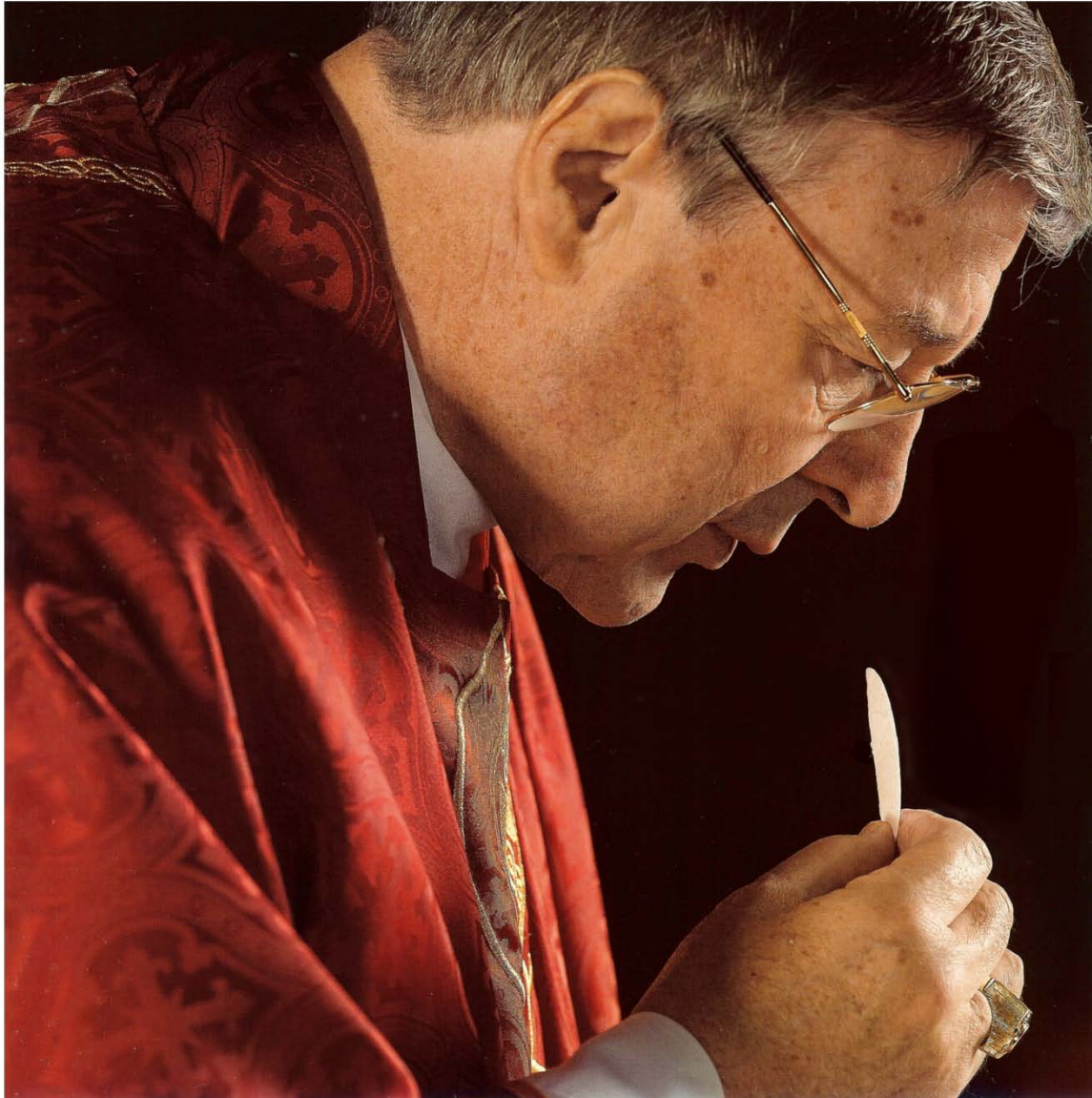
He nurses at the breast, but feeds the angels.

He is wrapped in swaddling clothes, but vests us with immortality.

He found no place in the inn, but makes for Himself a temple in the hearts of believers.

In order that weakness might become strong, Strength became weak.

- Sermon 190.3-4



[58. After this, standing and turned toward the altar, the priest says quietly: *Corpus Christi custodiat me in vitam aeternam* (May the Body of Christ bring me to everlasting life) and reverently receives the Body of Christ.

It may seem strange to some that we should consider the priest's Communion as an action separate from the Communion of the people. That wonderment may arise from a deeper question: what is a priest?

A priest is a man who preaches the Gospel, shepherds the faithful and offers sacrifice to God. ²⁷⁷ Surely, all the baptised - both laity and clergy - participate in the one priesthood of Christ, but each in their own proper way. *While being ordered one to another, they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace - a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit - the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads His Church.* ²⁷⁸

Priests are human beings with weaknesses; they, like all Christians, can sin. But at the altar, they act in the power and the place of the person of Christ Himself. ²⁷⁹ Priests are not deputies of the local community, but are ministers of Christ and of the entire Church. ²⁸⁰ To them is entrusted the office of presiding over the Eucharistic assembly and of providing the people of God with the Lord's Body and Blood.

The priest is not the 'host' of the Eucharistic Banquet; the One Who invites, prepares and provides is Christ Himself. But because the priest acts *in persona Christi*, he enters into the sacrifice of the Mass in a particularly intimate way. Just as Jesus had to complete His act of self-oblation on the Cross, saying "*It is finished,*" ²⁸¹ so it is required that the priest complete the sacrificial act by himself receiving the Body and Blood of Christ before sharing it with the faithful. *Nemo dat quod non habet.* (No one gives what he himself does not have.) ²⁸²

Just as he prays quietly to prepare himself for Holy Communion, he also prays quietly at the moment of reception, saying: *May the Body of Christ bring me to everlasting life.* This is not a prayer of the assembly, but the priest's private petition to the Lord Jesus, Whose Body he now holds in his hands, present on the altar through the words and actions of the priest. The Child of Bethlehem, the Teacher of the multitudes, the Man of Sorrows, the Risen Lord and Christ - it is He Whom the priest now holds. Jesus is the saving Victim, offered to the Father through the hands of His priest.

It is an intimate moment of communion between disciple and Master. In watching their spiritual father devoutly receive the Lord's Body, the faithful learn how to approach the altar in humility, in adoration, in love.

- 277 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1564
- 278 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1547
- 279 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1548
- 280 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1553
- 281 John 19:30
- 282 Latin axiom used today in property law

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Priest's Communion (Christ's Blood, shed for us)

*Lord, You gladden my mind with spiritual joy.
How glorious is Your cup, surpassing all previous delights.*

- On Psalm 22:5



158. ...Then (the priest) takes the chalice, saying quietly, *Sanguis Christi custodiat me in vitam aeternam* (May the Blood of Christ bring me to everlasting life), and reverently receives the Blood of Christ.

The bishop then communicates, followed by the priests, the deacons, the subdeacons, the readers, the singers and the monks; then, among the women, the deaconesses, the virgins and the widows; then the children; then the rest of the people, in order, with reverence and devotion, without disturbance. ²⁸³

The Catholic Church is an organised family, a hierarchical community. From its inception, the Church has followed certain ordered patterns of liturgical worship. Its clergy have always received Holy Communion first, never last.

Some would question this pattern, saying that it does not reflect true family life. Surely, parents ensure that their children have their food before taking some for themselves.

But it is important to recall that the Mass is both Banquet and Sacrifice. When the priest distributes Holy Communion to the faithful, he is inviting them to share in the Lord's Banquet. But when he himself receives the Lord's Body and Blood before the faithful, he is demonstrating the enormity of the Sacrifice.

Jesus died for us, to take away our sins. He invites us to join Him, to have a share in His Cross. ²⁸⁴ But He asks nothing of us that He did not Himself do first for our sakes.

Likewise, His priests are called to show us the way, to "*gladly spend and be utterly spent*" ²⁸⁵ for the sake of the flock, as the Master laid down His life for His sheep. ²⁸⁶ At the time of Holy Communion, the priest acts as the officiant of the holy Sacrifice. Like a father who will face difficulties before asking his children to do so, the priest of Jesus Christ partakes of the Chalice, responding to the question, "*Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?*" ²⁸⁷ The spiritual father drinks before asking the children to do the same.

The priest, acting *in persona Christi*, drinks of the Cup first because Christ Himself drank from the Cup first. Then the Cup of suffering becomes the Cup of Blessing: *The Cup of Blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ?* ²⁸⁸

The New Passover, however, is not a commemoration of a tragedy but a celebration of something wonderful, even joyful: *we have redemption through His Blood.* ²⁸⁹ Thus His Cup is glorious, and overflowing with grace and love.

Completing the Sacrifice by feasting on Christ's Body and drinking His Blood, the priest leaves the altar to share this inestimable Gift with the people. He does not tarry, but goes to them immediately. After all, acting in the person of Christ, he said to them in Jesus' own words, "*This is the Cup of My Blood ... it will be shed for you.*" ²⁹⁰

283 The Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 13, 10-17
284 cf Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:27
285 2 Corinthians 12:15
286 cf John 10:11
287 Matthew 20:22
288 1 Corinthians 10:16
289 Ephesians 1:7
290 words from the Consecration of the Chalice

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Communion Procession

*O Sacrament of love! O Sign of our unity!
O Bond of our fraternity! All who long for life
have here its very Source.
Let them come here and believe, unite with You and live!*

On John's Gospel 26:13



86. While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant is begun. Its purpose is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the 'communitarian' nature of the procession to receive Communion. The singing is continued for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful. If, however, there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion chant should be ended in a timely manner.
160. The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants who, as a rule, approach in a procession.

As he gives the oblation, the bishop says: "The Body of the Lord." He who receives it is to reply: "Amen." On his part, the deacon takes the cup and says as he gives it: "The Blood of Christ, the Cup of life." He who drinks it is to respond: Amen. While Communion is going on, Psalm 33(34) is chanted. ²⁹¹

The Church has always seen the moment of Holy Communion as a communal action. ²⁹² And at least from the time of St Augustine (354-430), the Church has accompanied this action with the singing of a psalm. A favourite of the first Christians was Psalm 33(34):

*I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips.
In the Lord my soul shall make its boast; the humble shall hear and be glad.*

*Glorify the Lord with me - together let us praise His Name.
I sought the Lord and He answered me; from all my terrors He set me free.*

*Look towards Him and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed.
This poor man called; the Lord heard him and rescued him from all his distress.*

*The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who revere Him, to rescue them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good! He is happy who seeks refuge in Him.*

*Revere the Lord, you His saints. They lack nothing, those who revere Him.
Strong lions suffer want and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing.*

This psalm was probably known by heart by early Christians. As other psalms were adopted for use on special occasions, antiphons or short refrains were sung by the assembly while cantors sang the psalm verses. For this psalm, a popular antiphon was simply the words *Taste and see that the Lord is good!* We have preserved these refrains in the Entrance and Communion Antiphons that are found in the Roman Missal. The Church encourages the faithful to sing psalms with their antiphons during the Communion Procession, continuing the ancient tradition.

The Communion Procession is communal movement. We do not come to the altar one at a time, but together, as one body. This procession is enabled and enhanced by communal singing. Some people prefer to look upon Holy Communion solely as a private, personal encounter with Christ. Certainly, some quiet moments should be provided for the individual's quiet reflection later, in the moment of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion. But St Augustine writes that *receiving the Eucharist does not so much mean that we partake of the divine life offered us, as that the divine life draws us unto itself ...* ²⁹³ And Christ came to draw us together as one body, in a "bond of fraternity." A mystery of divine-human love and communion is fashioned in the Eucharistic celebration, and it is realised in all its fullness at the altar. It is called a Holy Communion, not only because we become one with Christ, but also because of our communion with one another: *"Now you are Christ's Body, and individually parts of It."* ²⁹⁴

- 291 The Apostolic Constitutions, loc cit
- 292 cf Acts of the Apostles 2:46
- 293 St Augustine; cf Sermon 272, Tractate on John, 21; Confessions
Book VII
- 294 1 Corinthians 12:27

THE COMMUNION RITE: The People's Communion (Sharing in Christ's Sacrifice)



Every believer, before tasting other food, is to take care to receive the Eucharist ... Everyone is to take care that no unbeliever, no mouse or other animal eats of the Eucharist, and that no particle of the Eucharist falls on the ground or is lost. For it is the Body of the Lord that the faithful eat, and It is not to be treated carelessly. ²⁹⁵

Early Christians were clear: the Eucharist is not a symbol nor a reminder, but the true Body and Blood of Christ. The many accounts of Christian men and women who risked life and limb in order to share in the Eucharist speak more eloquently than any philosophical words could.

For we do not take this Food as though it were ordinary bread and wine. But, just as the Word of God, Jesus Christ, became incarnate, took flesh and blood for our salvation, in the same way this Food, which has become Eucharist thanks to the prayer formed out of the words of Christ, and which nourishes and is assimilated into our flesh and blood, is the Flesh and Blood of the incarnate Jesus: this is the doctrine that we have received. ²⁹⁶

St Cyril of Jerusalem describes how Christians of his time were to receive the Body of Christ: *In approaching, do not come forward with your wrists apart or your fingers spread, but make your left hand a throne for the right, since you are receiving into it a King, and cup your hand and receive the Body of Christ and say, "Amen". Then partake, ... being careful lest you lose anything of It ... Tell me: if someone gave you some grains of gold, would you not hold them with all carefulness, lest you lose some of them and thus suffer a loss? Will you not, then, be much more careful in keeping watch over what is more precious than gold and gems, so that not a particle of It may escape you?* ²⁹⁷

Early Christians received the Eucharist every day, ²⁹⁸ and ensured that those who could not participate would receive their 'daily bread': *The Eucharists are distributed and shared out to everyone, and the deacons are sent to take them to those who are absent.* ²⁹⁹

The words used in administering Holy Communion in the 4th century are those used today: *If you are the Body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are, you respond, "Amen" - "Yes, it is true!" By responding to it, you assent to it. For you hear the words, "The Body of Christ" and respond "Amen." Be, then, a member of the Body of Christ, that your "Amen" may be true.* ³⁰⁰

During most of the first millennium it was customary to receive Communion under both forms: bread and wine. Pope Gelasius I (d 496) criticised those who did not receive from the Cup: *"They should either receive the Sacrament in Its entirety or be kept from It altogether, since it is impossible to separate one and the same Mystery without severe sacrilege."* Anxiety about the possibility of

spilling, however, led to a change in the form of Communion in the Eastern Churches, where the danger of spilling was avoided by placing the Host in the consecrated Wine and then giving It to the communicant. This was rejected in the West, on the grounds that this was no longer an act of drinking. But this rejection had the consequence that, unlike in the East, the participation of the people in the Cup was entirely abandoned by the 12th-13th centuries.³⁰¹

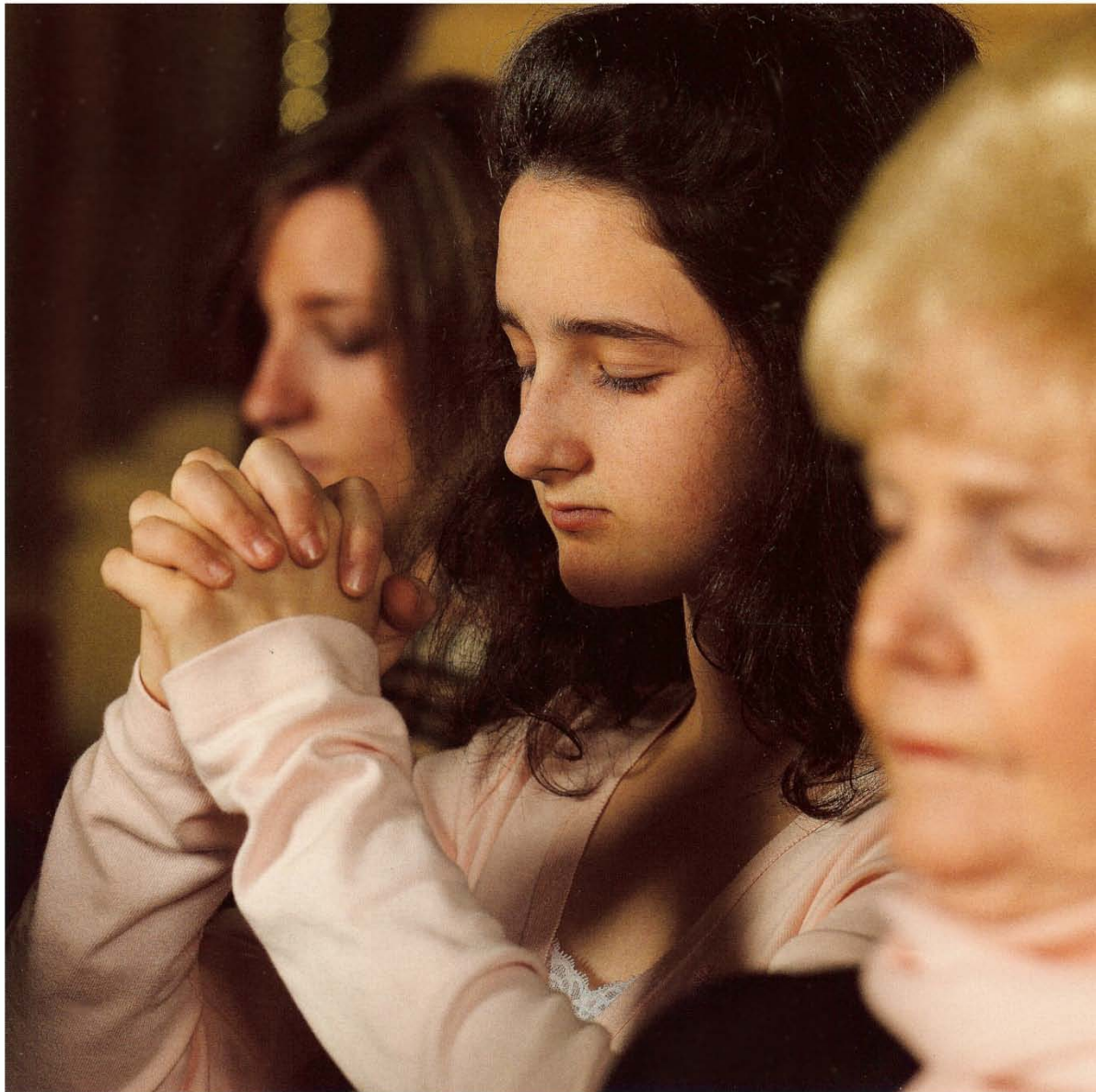
Drawings from about the year 500 depict communicants receiving the Eucharist while standing. The Lectionary of Bernward of Hildesheim (d 1022) is the first witness to reception of Communion while kneeling, an attitude that only slowly penetrated the West between the 11th and 16th centuries. In the Eastern Churches the faithful have always received Communion while standing,³⁰¹ a practice that has returned to the West.

- 295 St Hippolytus. Op cot, 32
- 296 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65-66
- 297 St Cyril of Jerusalem, op cit
- 298 cf Acts of the Apostles, loc cit
- 299 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 67
- 300 St Augustine, Sermon 272
- 301 cf Bernhard Kleinheyer, op cit, p 95
- 302 op cit, p 90

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Thanksgiving after Holy Communion

*Pray within yourself.
Be yourself a temple of God,
because God in His temple will hear the one who prays.*

- On John's Gospel 15:25



88. When the distribution of Communion is finished, as circumstances suggest, the priest and faithful spend some time praying privately. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the entire congregation.

Ritual prayer takes several forms: speaking, singing ... and silence. Silence can be for listening, or for speaking in the heart. Silence is necessary if our prayer is to be a true communication with God; otherwise, we risk the danger of being lost in many words. God speaks when we are still enough to listen.

The Church encourages silence at this moment of thanksgiving, and at other times during the liturgy: *Sacred silence, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. At the Act of Penitence ... at the Collect ... after the readings and the Homily ... After Communion, the faithful praise and pray to God in their hearts. Even before the celebration itself, it is commendable that silence be observed in the church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room, and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner.* ³⁰³

Private prayer after Holy Communion has long been a recommended practice. St Alphonsus Ligouri urged at least a half hour of prayer after the reception of the Eucharist. ³⁰⁴ Pope Pius XII strongly recommended that *"priest and faithful ... converse with the Divine Redeemer for at least a short while after Holy Communion."* ³⁰⁵ Canon Law cautions priests not to forget to make a proper thanksgiving after Mass, ³⁰⁶ and the Roman Missal includes various prayers to nourish the priest's devotion, both before and after Mass. Some of these prayers are also appropriate for the laity, e.g. *the Anima Christi* (Soul of Christ), St Ignatius Loyola's Prayer of Self-Dedication ("Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty"), and the *En Ego* (Prayer before the Crucifix).

Due to the infrequency of their reception of the Eucharist in past generations, many laity developed the habit of exiting Mass as the priest received Holy Communion. This habit still has an influence today, with some people leaving Mass early, even if they themselves have partaken of the Eucharist. It is incumbent, then, on priests to help their people develop a love for the prayer of silence:

We must try to rediscover something of what is called the contemplative attitude, actually experiencing it ourselves, not just talking about it interestingly. All around us we see activity ... but what directs it? An inwardness no longer really at home within itself which thinks, judges, acts from the surface ... An 'interiority' too superficial to contact the truth lying at life's centre, which no longer reaches the essential and everlasting ... ³⁰⁷

Historically, there are only isolated instances in the Roman rite of a hymn being sung after Holy Communion. It has become a widespread custom in recent years. Nevertheless, adequate time for silent prayer should not be rare. Such silence is important to the total rhythm of the celebration; it is important, too, for the spiritual development of the Christian soul. Catherine de Hueck Doherty wrote:

From within your heart and soul (the Trinity) will breathe forth the infinite power which is God's life. But for this to happen, the soul must be totally pure and ready to accept the loneliness of silence ... Silence is a dark night where soul and mind abide to wait for light that is God's speech. Silence is the key to the immense furnace of Love - the heart of God. Silence is the speech of passionate love spent in the arms of God. Silence is oneness with the Lord. ³⁰⁸

That is the essence of Holy Communion: oneness with the Lord.

303 GIRM, no. 45

304 St Alphonsus Liguori, *The Holy Eucharist*; 1745

305 Pope Pius XII, *Encyclical Letter Mystici Corporis*; 1943

306 *Code of Canon Law*, 909

307 Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility*, pp 92-104; 1951

308 Catherine deHueck Doherty, *Molchanie: The Silence of God*, p 13

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Purification of the Holy Vessels

What Christian is unaware of the words of the most blessed Sixtus, bishop of Rome and martyr of Christ, who said: "A pure mind is a holy temple for God, and a heart clean and without sin is His best altar"? You know that the clean heart must be brought to this perfection, whilst "the inward man is renewed day by day," (2 Cor 4:16) yet not without the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Anti-Pelagian Writings: On St Sixtus



163. When the distribution of Communion is finished, the priest himself immediately and completely consumes at the altar any consecrated Wine that happens to remain; as for any consecrated Hosts that are left, he either consumes them at the altar or carries them to the place designated for the reservation of the Eucharist. Upon returning to the altar, the priest collects any fragments that may remain. Then, standing at the altar or at the credence table, he purifies the paten or ciborium over the chalice, then purifies the chalice, saying quietly: *Quod ore sumpsimus (Lord, may I receive)*, and dries the chalice with a purificator. If the vessels are purified at the altar, they are carried to the credence table by a minister. Nevertheless, it is also permitted, especially if there are several vessels to be purified, to leave them suitably covered on a corporal, either at the altar or at the credence table, and to purify them immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people.

The purification of the sacred vessels is a functional task, similar to the necessary tasks of clearing the table and washing the dishes after a family meal.

However, the performance of these functional tasks at home can be opportunities for family members to communicate with one another and extend the conversation begun at table. Similarly, this moment of the Mass is a time for all of us, priest and people, to continue our prayerful communion with the Lord.

At the Preparation of the Gifts, the functional tasks of setting the altar with all the things necessary for the Eucharistic Sacrifice are clothed with prayer, gesture and even song. Similarly, the purification of the vessels has its own prayer that is said by the priest: *Lord, may I receive these gifts in purity of heart. May they bring me healing and strength, both now and for ever.*³⁰⁹ This indicates that the time of the purification of the vessels is not merely functional, but a time of prayerful reflection. Sometimes a post-Communion hymn of thanksgiving, or a quiet musical interlude, begins at this time; otherwise a brief period of silence enables everyone to pray quietly.

The oldest known form of purification after Holy Communion was the ablution of the mouth. St John Chrysostom (345-407) directed his priests to take a little water or eat a piece of bread so that none of the Sacred Species would remain in the mouth. Later, a sip of wine was used for this purpose.

Linked to the ablution of the mouth was the washing of the chalice and the purification of the priest's fingers. These actions were at first done in silence, but soon a number of prayers were added to foster the devotion of the priest. The 1570 Missal of Pope St Pius V codified the ritual actions and prayers for this part of the Mass.

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Prayer after Communion

*Praise and thanksgiving are offered to God,
by Whose grace you are what you are.*

- Letter 27 (to Paulinus) 27



89. To bring to completion the prayer of the People of God, and also to conclude the entire Communion Rite, the priest sings or says the Prayer after Communion, in which he prays for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated.

After you have eaten your fill, give thanks like this: We give You thanks, O holy Father, for Your Holy Name which You have made to dwell in our hearts, for the knowledge, faith and immortality that You have revealed to us through Jesus, Your Child. Glory to You for ever! It is You, almighty Master, Who has created the world, that Your Name may be praised; for their enjoyment You have given food and drink to the children of men; but us You have graciously favoured with a spiritual Food and with a Drink that gives eternal life, through Jesus Your Child. Above all, we give You thanks for Your own great power. Glory to You for ever! Amen. ³¹⁰

The Prayer after Holy Communion is an opportunity to ask for the spiritual effects or fruits of the Eucharist. Following the silence (and song) of the period of thanksgiving, it brings the Communion Rite to a prayerful close.

Although prayers for use after Holy Communion did not appear in official liturgical texts until the 5th century, earlier documents give evidence of post-Communion prayers, such as this one:

Let the bishop say: Almighty God, Father of the Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for having granted us to receive Your holy Mystery. Let it not be a cause for us of fault or of condemnation, but let it renew soul, body and spirit, through Your only Son. Through Him, glory to You and power, with Him and the Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever. And let the people reply: Amen. ³¹¹

Parish announcements, fundraising talks and other such business are not a part of the Communion Rite, but may follow the Prayer after Holy Communion.

310 Didache

311 St Hippolytus, op cit, 45-46

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Announcements (We are family)

There is a City, whose citizens we are, insofar as we are Christians.

St Paul addresses the citizens, saying: "You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are citizens like all the saints, and part of God's household.

You are part of a building what has the apostles and prophets for its foundations." (Eph 2:19-20)

You can see the structure of this great City, but do you see where that edifice stands firm, that it may never fall?

"Christ Jesus Himself," says Paul, "is its main cornerstone."

On Psalm 87:1-2



It has been mentioned already that some people continue the habit of leaving Mass early, a habit developed during the centuries when many lay people refrained from receiving Holy Communion. There are those, however, who make their exit early because they have little or no connection with the parish community and thus feel no need to listen to announcements about activities that serve to build up the life of the local community.

The great liturgist Father Romano Guardini again reminds us that *it is the task of the individual to apprehend clearly the ideal world of the liturgy. Individuals must ... go beyond their little personal aims and adopt the educative purpose of the great fellowship of the liturgy. It goes without saying, therefore, that they are obliged to take part in exercises which do not correspond to the particular need of which they are conscious; they must espouse ... causes which do not affect them personally, and which merely arise out of the needs of the community at large; they must at times ... take part in proceedings of which they do not entirely, if at all, understand the significance. All this is particularly difficult for modern people, who find it so hard to renounce their independence ... The problem of fellowship ... lies in their being required to divide their existence with other people ... and to know that they are united with these others in a higher unity.* ³¹²

The giving of announcements has always been a part of normal liturgical life in the Roman rite. In late 7th-century papal liturgies, the archdeacon would announce the time and place of the next papal Mass. He would do so immediately after the pope's Communion, probably due to the non-communicants who left at this time.

Pope St Leo the Great (r 440-461) reminded the faithful of the fast days for the coming week at the end of his homilies, and would invite them to attend the Saturday evening vigil (First Vespers) for the coming Sunday. This custom of joining parish announcements to the Homily was widespread until recently.

The Roman Missal directs that announcements be made after the Prayer after Communion, and not before. It also requires that such announcements be made from a place other than the ambo: *From the ambo only the readings, the responsorial Psalm, and the Exsultet (Easter Proclamation) are to be proclaimed; it may be used also for giving the Homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the Word should go up to it.* ³¹³

90. The Concluding Rites include brief announcements, if they are necessary.

312 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp 141-149

313 GIRN, no. 309

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Blessing

*Let our soul bless the Lord,
and let God bless us.
For when God blesses us, we grow,
and when we bless the Lord, we grow.
Both are profitable to us.*

- On Psalm 67:1



The Lenten season in the Patristic Era was a not only a time for catechumens to make final preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation. Penitents were also preparing to end their period of exclusion (self-imposed or Church-imposed) from Holy Communion. At Rome, it was customary for the deacon to invite these non-communicants, as well as the rest of the faithful who were spending the forty days of Lent in penance and prayer, to bow down and receive a blessing from the bishop.

This "Prayer over the People" was the origin of the Blessing given at the conclusion of the Mass of the Roman rite. However, earlier ancient liturgies included post-Communion blessings such as this one: *When they have communicated, let the priest lay his hands on them and say: Ever-living, almighty God, Father of the Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ, bless thy servants, men and women. Protect them, uphold them, content them by the power of Your archangel. Guard them, strengthen in them awe in the presence of Your majesty. Give them peace without fear or anxiety, through Your only Son. Through Him, glory to You and power, with Him and the Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever. Let the people reply: Amen.* ³¹⁴

From at least the 7th century on, the pope silently blessed the assembly as he processed out of the church after the Dismissal. Other bishops adopted this custom. Finally, priests began giving a simple blessing from the altar. Formulas of blessing appeared in the 13th century, with the present text being codified in the 1570 Roman Missal of Pope St Pius V.

To bless God means to praise Him for His goodness and gifts. To bless a person is to ask God to extend His generosity. In the Blessing at the end of Mass, the priest, acting *in persona Christi*, imitates the action of the Lord Jesus Who, before being taken up into Heaven, *"raised His hands, and blessed them* (His disciples)." ³¹⁵

He alone can bless that has the power. He alone is able to bless who is able to create. God alone can bless ... Blessing is the word of power of the Master of creation. It is the promise and assurance of the Lord of Providence. Blessing bestows a happy destiny ... God has imparted a portion of His power to bless to those whose vocation it is to create life. Parents possess this power: "The blessing of the father establishes the houses of the children." Priests possess it, for as parents engender natural life, so the priest begets the supernatural life of grace. To give life is the nature and office of both ... But the power to bless is always and only from God ... The power of divine blessings is merely lent to those who stand in God's stead. Fathers and mothers have it by the sacrament of Christian marriage. The priest has it by the sacrament of ordination ... To each of these the power of blessing is given with such difference as the nature of their apostleship determines. The visible representation of blessing is the hand. By its position and action it indicates the purpose of the blessing ... The hand, as it is the instrument of making and shaping, is also the instrument of spending and giving. ³¹⁶

The priest's anointed hand is raised over the assembly, and then traces over it the Sign of the *Cross in order that the fullness of God's life may flow into the soul and fructify and sanctify us wholly.* ³¹⁷

167. Then the priest, extending his hands, greets the people, saying: *Dominus vobiscum* (The Lord be with you). They answer: *Et cum spiritu tuo* (And with your spirit). The priest, joining his hands again and then immediately placing his left hand on his breast, raises his right hand and adds: *Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus* (May Almighty God bless you) and, as he makes the Sign of the Cross over the people, continues: *Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus* (the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit). All answer: *Amen*. On certain days and occasions this blessing, in accordance with the rubrics, is expanded and expressed by a Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula. A Bishop blesses the people with the appropriate formula, making the Sign of the Cross three times over the people.

314 St Hippolytus, op cit, 46

315 Luke 24:50

316 Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, pp 81-84

317 loc cit, p 14

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Dismissal

*We go now,
because we go upwards to the peace of the heavenly Jerusalem;
God's good pleasure has set us on that path,
so that we may desire nothing else than to dwell there for ever.*

— Confessions 9



Let the bishop say: The Lord be with you. And let the people reply: And with your spirit. Let the deacon say: Go in peace. With that, the sacrifice is ended. ³¹⁸

Nearly every traditional liturgy of ancient times includes a formal dismissal of the assembly. Among the Franks (people living in what is now approximately France and Germany), the words were "Let us bless the Lord." This became the accepted formula for Masses celebrated during penitential seasons, or when Mass was followed by another liturgical rite such as a procession.

At Rome, the traditional form was "*Ite, missa est*," - "Go, it is the dismissal." The Latin word *missa* means 'sending', and from it we derive English words like 'missile', 'missive', 'permission', 'dismiss', and 'mission'. It is this last meaning that can best be applied to the Mass.

"*Ite, missa est*" can also be translated as "Go, it is sent." What is sent? The Word that we have received into our hearts. It is now our mission to utilise the prophetic call we have all been given in Baptism, proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus to those who most need to hear His Good News. We do this by the words we speak and the example we set, allowing Christ to speak through us. "*You may be the only Gospel your neighbour ever hears.*" ³¹⁹

"Go, it is sent." What else is sent? The Body and Blood of Christ that we have assimilated into our own flesh and blood through our reception of Holy Communion. As members of His Mystical Body, the Church, we become His loving and healing presence for those we encounter: the poor, the sick, the neglected elderly. Some of us are called to reach out to prisoners, those enslaved by addictions, or those labouring under physical or psychological disabilities. Others of us are sent to people marginalised by society: the homeless, the unemployed, the young who feel hopeless. ³²⁰

Pope John Paul said, "*The Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door.*" ³²¹ All of us, young and old, are sent into the world to evangelise, to announce the Gospel to someone, somewhere.

Before He was taken up into Heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, and He says to us today: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold: I am with you always, even to the end of time.*" ³²² *Jesus Himself, through His disciples, sent forth from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.* ³²³

318 St Hippolytus, op cit

319 Michel Quoist, Prayers

320 cf Pope John Paul II, Message to the People of Spain on the occasion of the 45th Eucharistic Congress in Seville, 5 June 1994

321 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Dies Domini*

322 Matthew 28:19-20

323 Mark 16, 'the shorter ending'

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Recessional

*Now, my brothers and sisters, let us sing!
As pilgrims on the way, sing in hope — but keep on marching.
Are we making progress in good works, in true faith, in right living?
Then we are on the right way — but don't rest in order to sing.
No, sing and march in the hope of eternal rest.*

- Sermon 256:3



169. Then, as a rule, the priest venerates the altar with a kiss and, after making a genuflection with the lay ministers, departs with them.

At the beginning of the Mass, the altar is kissed in a gesture of greeting. At the conclusion, the altar is again kissed, but this time in an act of farewell.

In earlier times, the priest kissed the altar before imparting the Blessing, as if to receive the blessing from Christ before sharing it with the assembly. But the liturgy of that time reversed the order of the Blessing and Dismissal, and the priest kissed the altar again before announcing the Dismissal. Today's liturgy more logically makes the Dismissal follow the Blessing, with the kissing of the altar after the Dismissal to make its valedictory character clear.

This farewell kiss looks back to the Eucharist which has concluded, and reminds all present that Christ, the foundation stone of the Church, must be the foundation of all we say and do now, as we bring His message to a waiting world.

The official texts make no mention of a Recessional Song. Medieval books often contained various texts to accompany the departure of the priest, *e.g.* Daniel 3:57-88, Psalm 150, or the Prologue of St John's Gospel. This latter text was eventually standardised as the "Last Gospel," and was read at the Gospel side (left hand side, as one looks at the altar from the nave) before the priest left the sanctuary. Since the liturgical renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council, this has been removed from the Mass.

Neither Western nor Eastern liturgies have concluded with singing as a matter of rite. However, to give the celebration a certain sense of conclusion, and to accompany the departure of the clergy and ministers, it has become customary to have a song sung by the choir and/or the assembly.

Some places prefer to have music played on the organ or other instruments to accompany the Recessional. And many places are returning to the custom of silence at the Recessional during Lent, to highlight the return of the organ at Easter.³²⁴

It is wise not to make the Communion Rite and the Concluding Rites disproportionate in terms of music. A Communion Hymn, Post-Communion Hymn of Thanksgiving, and Recessional Hymn are not equally required by the Roman Missal. In fact, only the first of these three is required; the second is permitted, and the third is not even mentioned. It is more important to sing the various acclamations, chants and responses of the Mass, and then allow time for reflection at appropriate moments. *Every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. In the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, however, preference should be given to those that are of greater*

importance and especially to those to be sung by the priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the priest and people together. ³²⁵

If there is to be a Recessional Song, it should be one that relates to the feast or season that is celebrated, or be a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Who has gathered His people and now sends them to accomplish His mission in the world.

324 GIRM, no.313; cf Musicam Sacram, 1967 Instruction on Sacred Music, nos. 62-77

325 GIRM 40

The Altar



The Church now requires that the Blessed Sacrament be kept in a tabernacle which "should be irremovable, made of solid and inviolable material that is not transparent, and be locked in such a way that prohibition is prevented to the greatest extent possible." (General Instruction of the Roman Missal 314)
When in use, the Tabernacle is normally covered with a veil or canopy to indicate the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and a lamp burns before it in honour of the Lord.

ALTAR

"The altar on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present under the sacramental signs is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is called together to participate in the Mass, as well as the centre of thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist." - General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 296

The word "altar" refers to an elevated place where sacrifice is offered. The altar is the principal object of liturgical furniture in a church, and ideally has a table of stone and is built free-standing so that the priest may walk around it. See the Chapter "Kissing the Altar" for more consideration of the altar.

AMBO

"The dignity of the word of God requires that the church have a place that is suitable for the proclamation of the word and toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word". - General Instruction of the Roman Missal n.309

Arrangements for the place of proclaiming the Word during Mass have varied over the centuries, from high stone pulpits to simple moveable lecterns, but the nature of the proclamation of the scripture readings and the homily obviously suggest that *"It is appropriate that this place be ordinarily a stationary ambo and not simply a moveable lectern. The ambo must be located ... in such a way that the ordained ministers and lectors may be clearly seen and heard by the faithful."* - General Instruction of the Roman Missal 309

CHAIR

"The chair for the priest celebrant must signify his office of presiding over the gathering and directing the prayer." - General Instruction of the Roman Missal n. 310

The chair for the celebrating priest is quite distinct from the chair or "cathedra" of the bishop in his cathedral, which is *"the sign of his teaching office and pastoral power in the particular Church (i.e. the diocese), and a sign also of the unity of believers in the faith that the bishop proclaims as shepherd of the Lord's flock."* - Ceremonial of Bishops n.42

TABERNACLE

"... the Most Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer." – General Instruction of the Roman Missal n.314

The Tabernacle, meaning "tent" or "dwelling place", is a receptacle in which particles of the Blessed Sacrament are kept secure so that Holy Communion may be taken to the sick and dying at any time and so that the faithful may adore Christ who remains truly present in the Eucharistic species. In early centuries the Hosts for Communion of the sick would be kept in a special cupboard in the sanctuary, or later in a receptacle often made in the shape of a dove and suspended over the altar. By the 17th Century the form of Tabernacle with which we are now familiar had come into general use.

Sacred Vessels



THE CIBORIUM



THE PATEN



THE CHALICE

CHALICE

The chalice is the cup into which wine is poured for the celebration of Mass. Chalices may be simple or ornate in design, but must be made of precious material, ordinarily gold or at least gold-plated inside the cup.

PATEN

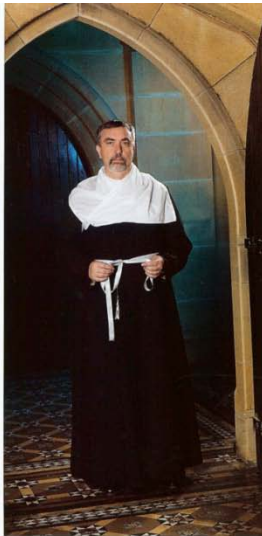
The paten, in its classical form, is a small gold plate on which at least the large altar-bread to be received as Communion by the priest is placed. It may also take a larger, more bowl-like form in order to hold all the breads that will be consecrated for the Communion of the congregation, or these may instead be held in a ciborium.

CIBORIUM

The word "ciborium" refers to a cup with a cover or lid. Often made in a shape similar to a chalice, the ciborium is used to hold the altar breads that are to be

consecrated for the people to receive Holy Communion at Mass, and has a close-fitting lid so that any remaining Hosts can be secure from moisture and vermin when placed in the Tabernacle.

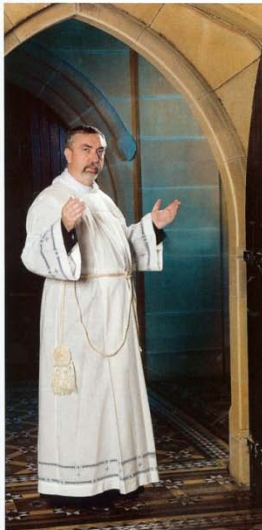
The Vestments of the Priest at Mass



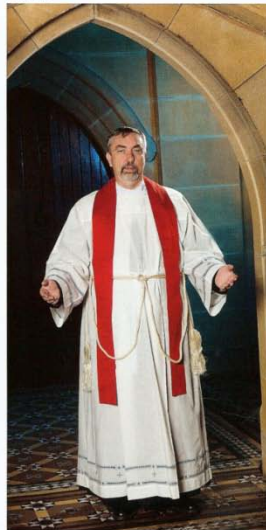
THE AMICE



THE ALB



THE CINCTURE



THE STOLE



THE CHASUBLE

COLOUR OF VESTMENTS

The chasuble and stole, and sometimes the cincture, are made of coloured fabric. The particular colour worn depends on the liturgical season or feast and conveys something of the spirituality of that liturgy. While at different times and in different places the scheme of these liturgical colours has varied, the present arrangement is ordinarily as follows:

WHITE, symbolic of joy: The Easter and Christmas seasons, celebrations of the Lord (other than his Passion), of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels, and saints who were not martyrs.

RED, symbolic of blood and of the Holy Spirit: Palm Sunday and Good Friday, Pentecost Sunday, feasts of the apostles and evangelists and of martyred saints.

GREEN, symbolic of hope: During Ordinary Time

VIOLET, symbolic of penance: Advent and Lent, and may be worn at Masses for the Dead

BLACK, symbolic of mourning: Masses for the Dead

ROSE, symbolic of rejoicing: The Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the mid-points of the penitential seasons.

"In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, not all members have the same office. This variety of offices in the celebration of the Eucharist is shown outwardly by the diversity of sacred vestments, which should therefore be a sign of the office proper to each minister." - General Instruction of the Roman Missal n. 335.

The vestments worn by the priest for the celebration of Mass have ancient origins. In the first centuries of the Church, the ordinary clothing of the period was worn by the ministers at divine worship, though it is probable they wore the very best available for the celebration of the Eucharist. Over time, however, certain items of clothing came to be associated principally with liturgical functions, and some of the symbolic garments of public office-bearers came into Church use. Bishops, priests and deacons have vestments that are

particular to their office. There is not space here to describe in detail the interesting variety and history of each of the vestments used by the ministers at Mass, so we will refer here to those vestments presently worn by the priest.

AMICE

A rectangular piece of linen with long tapes attached at two corners, the amice was originally a covering for the head and shoulders. Priests who are monks or friars still wear it thus, over the cowl of their habit, when they vest for Mass. Diocesan and other priests no longer use it to cover the head, except briefly when they put it on, but arrange it about the neck.

ALB

The alb is a long loose white tunic, customarily made of linen, which reaches from the shoulders to the ankles. It probably originates in the tunics commonly worn by people in antiquity. It is sometimes decorated on the sleeves and near the hem.

CINCTURE

The cincture is a girdle tied over the alb to gather and hold its folds. It is usually a woven cord with tassels at each end.

The amice, alb, and cincture are common to all the liturgical ministers at Mass, over which bishops, priests and deacons wear the vestments proper to their order. In the case of priests celebrating Mass this means the addition of the following:

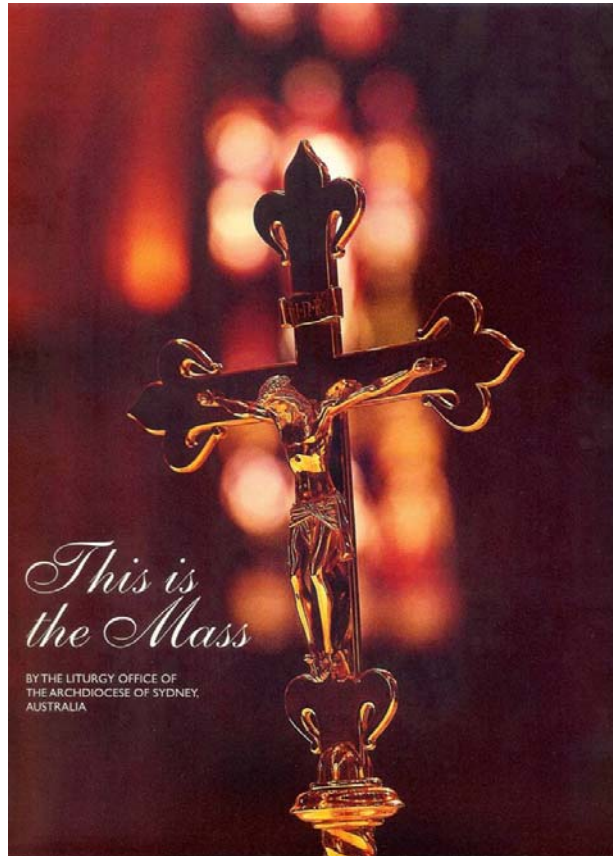
STOLE

The stole is a long band of fabric which, for priests, is worn around the neck and hangs down in front.

CHASUBLE

The chasuble is the outer garment which has become characteristic of the priest at Mass and is likewise worn by bishops at the altar. It has its probable origin in the ordinary outer garment of the lower classes in the late Roman Empire. From its original conical shape it has evolved into two main forms: the stiff, rather square and cut-down shape of the Baroque era; and the more ample, flowing vestments illustrated in this book.

THIS IS THE MASS: Introduction



The Eucharist was instituted by Our Lord Himself at the Last Supper as a memorial to His suffering, death and resurrection. As the supreme sacrament, it continues to sustain the faithful in their struggles for goodness and faith. It is indeed the gift of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ our Savior. The celebration of the Eucharist – the Mass – is central to our lives as Catholics, so it is important that we know and learn as much about it as we can. This knowledge will help us appreciate better its beauty and depth and allow us to participate more fully in our worship of God. *This Is The Mass* is the latest and most thorough general commentary since Vatican II. Its learned and lucid text and the beauty of the photographs which accompany it open our hearts and minds to the wonder and glory of the Mass. We hope that Catholics will grow in their love of the Eucharist and their appreciation of their faith by reading and contemplating *This Is The Mass*.

+ George Cardinal Pell
Archbishop of Sydney

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Entrance Procession

*We are travelers, always on the move.
What does that mean?
That we have to keep moving forward
if we want to reach the goal.*

— Sermon 169:18



47. After the people have gathered, the Entrance chant begins as the priest enters with the deacon and ministers. The purpose of this chant is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers.

We are a pilgrim people!¹ This image is marvelously vivid and full of movement. It expresses well the Church's existence in the here-and-now, sometimes wandering, sometimes snuggling, but always on the move.

Early Christians were hunted down for refusing to participate in the pagan worship of the Roman Empire. They met in private homes for the liturgy, coming in ones and twos from their own dwellings. When all had arrived, the bishop or priest rose to begin the liturgy, and all rose with him.

After nearly three centuries of savage persecution, the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313. It became fashionable to be Christian, and the great numbers of converts caused Constantine to hand over to the Church several "basilicas" or public halls for use as places of worship. He also conferred upon bishops the signs of respect given to the highest civic officials: an escort of attendants who carried lights and incense.

The Christians considered the honors given to the bishop as given to them all. They rose for his entrance, not only to show their respect, but also to express their unity and common dignity.

The Entrance Procession today is not an archaic formality or even a practical matter of bringing the priest and ministers to the altar. It is much more than that. It is a sign of the journey of the pilgrim Church on earth towards the heavenly Jerusalem. The procession moves in stately progress toward the altar, the "high place" where God awaits His people: *Let us go rejoicing to the house of the Lord. It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to give thanks to the name of the Lord.*²

It is no unruly crowd that enters, but a liturgical assembly. The order of the procession reflects the ordered composition of the Church, because the assembly is *a royal priesthood, a holy nation*,³ and so it is hierarchically structured. Incense signals the dignity of those who are led by the cross with the image of Christ, because the Church follows Christ Who enters our midst. The cross is flanked by candles, just as ancient rulers were honored by attendants bearing lights and incense.

Then come others, arranged in their proper rank. Some can see this as 'least to greatest' since the principal celebrant is last. Others, however, can view this as 'greatest to least', since *the one who is greatest must be servant of all*.⁴

We come to Mass both as individuals and as an assembly. Together we come into God's presence; in His sight all are important, all are His children. Some of the people we may know well, others may be known only in passing, or not at all. But in the movement of the procession and the standing of the assembly, together we become a people - a pilgrim people, a people on the move.

Together we will pray, listen, sing. Together we will share the one Bread and the one Cup. Together we will join in the one saving action of Christ which began at the Last Supper and continues on through the centuries as a surging wave of redemption, each Mass like a wave on the ocean of salvation history.

Our task is to find our place in the enormous whole.

- 1 (Chapter VII, Lumen Gentium, The Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council)
- 2 Psalm 122:1,4
- 3 1 Peter 2:9
- 4 Matthew 20:16,26

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: Entrance Song

*Singing comes out of happiness,
and, if you look closer, out of love.
So one who knows how to appreciate the "new life"
also knows how to sing a "new song."*

-- Sermon 34:1



39. The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (cf. Col 3:16). Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2:46). Thus St Augustine says rightly, 'Singing is for one who loves.' There is also the ancient proverb: 'One who sings well prays twice.'

40. Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly.

The people of Israel were especially fond of music. Genesis tells us that Jubal was the traditional inventor of musical instruments;⁵ hence our words 'jubilee' and 'jubilation'.

There could have been no people more jubilant than those who narrowly escaped slavery in Egypt by racing across the miraculously opened bed of the Red Sea. Miriam, the sister of Moses, took up a tambourine and led the people in a breathless but triumphant song of praise to God their Savior.⁶

The psalms of the shepherd-king David became the staple of the hundreds of singers and instrumentalists in Solomon's Temple who led the people in song every day. Jesus and His apostles themselves sang these psalms: *And singing a psalm, they went to the Mount of Olives.*⁷ Among the last words of Christ on the cross were the opening lines of Psalm 22: *"My God, my God, why have You abandoned Me?"*

Like the Israelite tribes of old, we sing as the Entrance Procession makes its way through the parted assembly, from the door of the church to the altar: *Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise!*⁸

Even in their first gatherings in homes, the early Christians sang, as St Paul testifies.⁹ When the Roman persecutions ended and Christians were allowed to worship publicly, their liturgy became a splendid affair and choirs were formed to lead the people's singing, and to perform specialized songs on their own. Members of the *schola cantorum* or choir, standing in two double rows at the entrance to the sanctuary, would sing alternating verses of a psalm while the people joined in short antiphon or refrain.

Singing unites the assembly, and makes the procession an event in which all can share. Silence at this point is unnatural, because it focuses everyone's attention on those who are walking. Singing allows everyone to participate in the action, to be caught up in the spirit of the celebration that is beginning.

The assembly does not stand to welcome the priest celebrant, but stands to welcome Christ Himself. He is present in the person of the priest, and He is present in the gathered assembly of the faithful. At that moment, singing together as the procession moves through our midst, we individuals form ourselves as a unit, *a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart*¹⁰ on its pilgrim way to the heavenly Jerusalem. Each one of us says with the psalmist, *"I will go to the altar of God, the God of my joy."*¹¹

- 5 Genesis 4:21
- 6 Exodus 15:1-21
- 7 Mark 14:26
- 8 Psalm 100:4
- 9 Colossians 3:16
- 10 1 Peter 2:9
- 11 Psalm 43:4



THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **Showing Reverence**

*When people bend the knee or stretch out their hands,
or even bow themselves down in prayer,
they are using their bodies to show their inner spirit of prayer.
God knows our unseen desire and our heart's intention,
and He does not need these signs that we are praying to Him;
but we need them, because they help us pray
more humbly and more fervently.*

On the Trinity: 7



The Israelites knew God as a Father, and often spoke to Him with startling familiarity. But they were also conscious of another relationship: "*A mighty God is the Lord, a great King above all gods ... He is our God, and we the people who belong to His pasture, the flock that is led by his hand*".¹² Their relationship to God as King, Lord and Creator led them to cry out: "*Come in, let us bow and bend low, let us kneel before the God Who made us!*"¹³

Great figures of the Bible are found showing reverence in God's presence. Moses removed his sandals before God's presence in the Burning Bush, David prostrated himself on the ground before the Ark of the Covenant, Elijah veiled his face with his cloak when the Divine Presence was revealed to him. Jesus Himself, praying to His Father in the garden before His arrest, knelt to pray.

St Paul imitated His Master: "*I fall on my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.*"¹⁴ And he proclaimed that "*at the Name of Jesus every knee shall bend, in heaven and on earth and even under the earth.*"¹⁵

Good parents want their children's love, but also their respect. Our reverence toward God, and toward the things of God, expresses our respect and our adoration. We need to adore God and to reverence Him, for the good of our souls.

When coming into the immediate presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Catholics genuflect to salute and worship the Lord Jesus. Approaching the altar, they bow in reverence to the place of Sacrifice and the table of Communion. During the Eucharistic Prayer and again in the preparation for holy Communion, they kneel to offer that special form of praise that is adoration. On Good Friday, and in ordinations and religious professions, people humbly prostrate themselves on the floor. Our bodies outwardly express our inner attitudes of prayer.

The Revelation of St John portrays the twenty-four elders in heaven who represent all creation in adoration before God. When we adore God, when we show Him reverence with our bodies, at that moment we are there for God, and for God alone.

We cannot see God, because everything here is still in the obscurity of time, still earthly. But we know by faith that He is present in the sacred liturgy. He is God, and we are His creatures. He made us, and we have our very existence in Him.

An ancient Christian prayer says it well: *It is before You, O eternal Father, through Your only begotten Son, that we bend the knee... Give us your hand, O Master, and lift us up. Raise us, O God of mercies! Let our gaze be lifted towards You, let our eyes be opened!*¹⁶

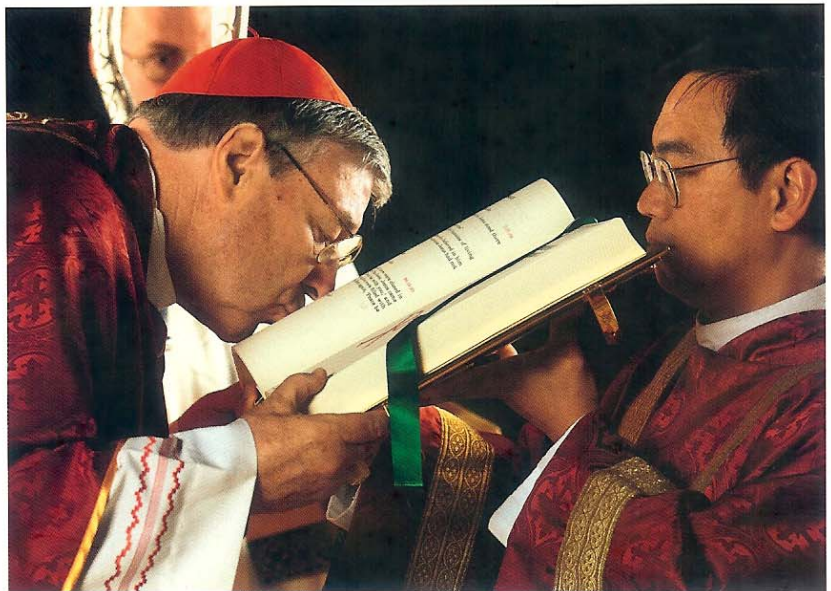
13 Psalm 95:6

14 Ephesians 3:14-15

15 Philippians 2:10

16 Euchology, Prayer at the Genuflection

42. The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers, as well as those of the people, ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity, so that the true and full meaning of the different parts of the celebration is evident and that the participation of all is fostered. Therefore, attention should be paid to what is determined by this General Instruction and the traditional practice of the Roman Rite and to what serves the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than private inclination or arbitrary choice.



THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **Kissing the Altar**

*Christ and His Church persevered
through a multitude of martyrs.
This Church, this inheritance of God,
has been gathered together out of the nations
by means of the Stone which the builders rejected,
which has become the Cornerstone.*

-- On Psalm 79:3



49. When they reach the sanctuary, the priest, the deacon, and the ministers reverence the altar with a profound bow. As an expression of veneration, moreover, the priest and deacon then kiss the altar itself; as the occasion suggests, the priest also incenses the cross and the altar.
302. The practice of placing relics of Saints, even those not Martyrs, under the altar ... is fittingly retained.

There is scarcely any element that is so firmly located in the realm of the senses as a kiss exchanged between persons, and even from person to thing. A kiss that comes from love or respect is a gesture of great significance. When the priest kisses the altar at the beginning and end of Mass, he is kissing 'the next best thing' - Christ is not present on the altar in His Body and Blood at this point, but He will be (or He has been), and therefore that altar is precious.

It is the holy place of sacrifice, the table of the Lord's Supper, the cornerstone of our existence as His People. Approaching it, the priest is moved to bend down and kiss it. In doing so, he salutes Christ on our behalf. He does more - he shows our love for Christ.

The altar is the frontier, the border where God comes to us and we go to Him in a most special way. ¹⁷ It is the table to which God our Father invites us. Through Baptism we have become His sons and daughters, and so His house is ours. At the altar we enjoy the intimate community of His sacred table, and a profound mystery of divine-human love is realized. ¹⁸

The altar represents Christ the Cornerstone ¹⁹ that is living. ²⁰ St Paul, referring to the rock which gushed forth water for the Israelites in the desert, says that "*the Rock was Christ.*" ²¹ This is why the altar - at least its *mensa* or top, if not the entire structure - is ideally made of solid stone.

The altar is a tomb - but not Christ's. Rather, it has been a praiseworthy tradition to enclose the relics of saints within or beneath the altar. St Ambrose says: "*Let the triumphant victims take their place where Christ is the Victim. He who suffered for all is above the altar; those redeemed by His sufferings are beneath the altar.*"

²² Indeed, Scripture itself alludes to the early Christian practice of celebrating the Eucharist upon the sarcophagus of a martyr on the anniversary of his or her death: "*When the fifth seal was broken, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.*" ²³

Thus the presence of the relics of saints serves to verify the scriptural reminder that when we celebrate the liturgy, "*we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses*" ²⁴ and bears witness to the sacrifice which those before us have made for Christ.

Finally, since the Eucharist is at the centre of the Church's worship, it is only fitting that the altar is central to the place where the Church gathers. It is the focus of liturgical spirituality for all our sacramental rites when Christians come before it to pray, to prostrate, to promise, to commit. It is around the altar that we gather, so that it becomes the sign of what we ourselves are: *"What is the altar of Christ, if not the form of the body of Christ?"* ²⁵

The altar is of such importance that it is consecrated with rites that parallel Baptism. Like the Christian, the altar is washed, anointed, enlightened with fire and clothed in a white garment. It is a powerful sign of the Church's unity: *"There is one bishop, one altar, one sacrifice."* ²⁶

Kissing the altar, a simple table is not being saluted. Rather, we are expressing our love for the Church that exists both in heaven and on earth, and for Christ Who is the Cornerstone of that Church.

17 Bernhard Kleinheyer, *The Meaning of the Sacramental Symbols*, p 139

18 cf Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 53-57

19 cf 1 Peter 2:7, Ephesians 2:20

20 cf 1 Peter 2:4

21 1 Corinthians 10:4

22 St Ambrose, *Letter* 22:13

23 Revelation 6:9

24 Hebrews 11:1

25 Ambrose, *On The Sacraments*, 5, 2, 7

26 St Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians*, 4

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **The Sign of the Cross**

*Of what use is it to make the Sign of the Cross upon your body
if the Sign of the Cross is not upon your heart?
God does not want us to simply make pictures of His signs,
but to act upon them.*

- On Psalm 50:1



50. When the Entrance chant is concluded, the priest stands at the chair and, together with the whole gathering, makes the Sign of the Cross.

Catholic parents - even those who do not regularly practise the Faith - find themselves holding the right hand of their infant child and guiding him or her to make the Sign of the Cross.

The words of this most Catholic of gestures come to us from Christ Himself: *"Go, therefore, make disciples of the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* ²⁷

As early as the 2nd century, Christians were signing themselves with the Cross, making a small cross upon their foreheads with their thumb or finger. St Hippolytus of Rome says: *"This Sign shows forth the Passion which opposes the devil, if you make it with faith, not to please others, but knowing how to use it as a breastplate... This is what Moses represented through the Passover lamb which was sacrificed, when he sprinkled the thresholds and smeared the doorposts with its blood."* ²⁸

St Jerome also refers to the Exodus event when he reminds his disciples: *"Keep the door of your heart shut, and frequently defend your forehead with the Sign of the Cross, lest the exterminator of Egypt (Satan) find some unguarded spot in you."* ²⁹

This small Sign on the forehead is still seen today in the liturgies of Baptism, Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick, and in the imposition of ashes. But by the 4th century it had become the large Sign from forehead to chest and from shoulder to shoulder. It was also being used at many points within the liturgy.

Official persecutions had ended in the early 4th century, but there were now many religious arguments between various groups of Christians, and between Christians and unbelievers. St Cyril of Jerusalem gave this advice: *"When you are about to dispute with unbelievers... first make with your right hand the Sign (of the Cross), and your opponent will be speechless. Do not be ashamed to confess the Cross."* ³⁰

And the great St Athanasius, who defended the Church's teaching about the Trinity, rings out: *"By the Sign of the Cross all magic ceases, all spells are powerless, every idol is abandoned and deserted... and the person on earth gazes into heaven."* ³¹

Making the Sign of the Cross, we profess faith in Blessed Trinity, the one God existing as a community of divine Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we cross ourselves, then, it should not be a small cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning.

A large unhurried Sign can better include the whole of us - our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us at once - consecrating and sanctifying us. It does so because it is the Sign of our redemption. Indeed it is the holiest of all our religious gestures. We begin and end all of our prayers with it; and the Mass, being the greatest prayer of all, fittingly begins and concludes with it. Through this Sign the whole liturgy is strengthened with Christ's strength, and consecrated in the name of the Triune God.³²

27 Matthew 28:19

28 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 36

29 St Jerome, Letter 130:9

30 St Cyril of Jerusalem, Cathetical Instructions, 13:22

31 St Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word, no 1

32 cf Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, pp 13-14

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **The Greeting**



50. Then (the priest) signifies the presence of the Lord to the community gathered there by means of the Greeting. By this greeting and the people's response, the mystery of the Church gathered together is made manifest. After the greeting of the people, the priest, the deacon, or a lay minister may very briefly introduce the faithful to the Mass of the day.

A simple love story in the Bible has given us one of our most familiar lines in the liturgy. It is the story of the young widow Ruth, a pagan girl who chose to remain with her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi in Bethlehem rather than return to her own country.

Ruth went to work in the field of Naomi's kinsman Boaz, gleaning the wheat left over by the reapers. One day, while inspecting the work being done, he greeted the reapers: "*The Lord be with you.*" ³³ Then, spying the new young woman there, he asked who she was; the rest is biblical history.

The priest's greeting and the people's response at the beginning of Mass is not intended to be a simple social exchange. While the priest is free to welcome people to the celebration and introduce the reason for the liturgical gathering, these words come only after the liturgical greeting.

"The Lord be with you" is not a social greeting, but a spiritual one. It is the celebrant's expressed wish that God will animate the people who have gathered to offer Him thanks and praise in Christ and the Holy Spirit. The people's response, *"And with your spirit,"* also comes from Scripture, used by St Paul in his Epistles:

"Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" ³⁴ ... *"The Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Grace be with you."* ³⁵...

When the people respond to the priest, they are expressing the wish that he will lead their worship in the power of the Spirit that he received at ordination, as St Paul described it to his disciple St Timothy: *"Stir up into a flame the gift of God that you received through the laying on of my hands, for God has not given us a cowardly spirit, but one that is strong, loving and wise"* ³⁶

The greeting which a bishop uses at Mass repeats the words that the Risen Christ used when He appeared to His disciples gathered in the Upper Room: *"Peace be with you."* ³⁷ The bishop is the primary celebrant of the liturgy in his diocese, with the priests acting as his helpers and delegates. ³⁸ Therefore this Easter greeting of peace is reserved to the bishop.

There are other liturgical greetings that are used, also having their origin in the New Testament and used in ancient liturgies: ³⁹ *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"* ⁴⁰ and *"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all."* ⁴¹ These words, spoken at the very start of the Mass, lead us out of our everyday world and into the timelessness that is of the very essence of the liturgy. For when we celebrate the Eucharist, we enter the eternal moment of the Father's love for us, the Son's redeeming act accomplished in the Holy Spirit.

33 Ruth 2:4

34 Galatians 6:18, Philemon 25

35 2 Timothy 4:22

36 2 Timothy 1:6-7

37 John 20:19, 21

38 cf GIRM 92: Every legitimate celebration of the Eucharist is directed by the Bishop, either in person or through priests who are his helpers. Cf also no. 42, Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy

39 such as the Liturgy of Addai and Mari, second half of the 3rd c
40 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2,
Philippians 1:2, Collosians 1:2, Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:2,
Philemon 1:3
41 2 Corinthians 13:14

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water

*The word of faith possesses such power in the Church of God,
that when the priest presents us with water which he blesses and sprinkles,
he purifies even the tiny infant.
This is done by means of God's Word, for the Lord says:
"Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken to you."*

- On John's Gospel 80:3



51. On Sundays, especially in the Season of Easter, in place of the customary Act of Penitence, from time to time the Blessing and Sprinkling of Holy Water to recall Baptism may take place.

Water is a mysterious thing, on the one hand smooth and transparent, so "modest" as St Francis calls it, as if it hardly existed in its own right. It is a humble servant, washing away dirt and satisfying thirst. On the other hand, water is a restless, foundationless, enigmatic force that can draw us into destruction. It is an apt image for this life of ours that looks so clear and yet is so inexplicable.

The Church uses water as the sign and the bearer of the divine life of grace. Christians emerge from the waters of Baptism into a new life, born again of water and the Holy Spirit. In those same waters the old individual was destroyed and put to death. By her consecration of it, the Church has freed water from the dark powers that sleep in it. She blesses it and asks God to make of it a vehicle of His grace.

Christians, when they enter the church, moisten forehead, breast and shoulders - all their person - with the clean and cleansing water in order to cleanse their souls.⁴² In this rite, a connection is made between Eucharist, Cross and Baptism. On Sunday, which is 'a little Easter', it is especially appropriate to recall this connection; as the rite reminds us, *"This water will be used to recall our Baptism."*

The sprinkling rite continues a spiritual tradition that is not uniquely Christian, having originated with the Jews. Sticklers for cleanliness ever since their long sojourn in the desert, they always washed head, hands and feet before praying at home or in the synagogue. Whenever they went to the Temple in Jerusalem, they stripped down and bathed in a ritual bath called a *mikvah* before donning special clothing for worship and entering the Temple precincts.

Temple worship included ritual sprinklings with 'lustral water', that is, water into which were mixed the ashes of a sacrificed red heifer. The psalmist recalls this when he prays, *"You will sprinkle me, O Lord, using a branch of hissop, and I shall be cleansed; You will wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow."*⁴³

Early Christian house-churches used the atrium, an entry courtyard equipped with a pool to catch rain water, not only for baptisms, but also for regular ritual purification. When Christianity was legalized and basilicas were taken over for use as churches, entry courtyards were added which included pools or fountains. St Peter's and other older basilicas of Rome still have fountains or pools in their *atria*.

As time went on, churches continued to locate the baptismal font near the entry, and to this day we find holy water fonts or 'stoops' at church doors, keeping ritual purification in the Church's consciousness.

While the Act of Penitence is a purification of sorts, it is a verbal one. But Catholic liturgy is not simply verbal, but is rich in symbol and gesture. Thus the Sprinkling Rite, when it is used, replaces the spoken Act of Penitence. This denotes a penitential spirit, a preparation for the Eucharistic celebration, and a remembrance of Baptism; for as Baptism wipes out all guilt, so also this sprinkling should remind us of our failings, and be for us a sign of conversion.

42 cf Romano Guardini, *op cit*, pp 45-48

43 Psalm 51:7

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Confiteor (Confessing our sinfulness)



The priest invites those present to take part in the Act of Penitence, which, after a brief pause for silence, the entire community carries out through a formula of general confession. This rite concludes with the priest's absolution, which, however, lacks the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance.

There are three forms of the Act of Penitence; the first is the *Confiteor* or "I confess".

This communal confession of our unworthiness is most effective when preceded by a pause for silence sufficient to allow everyone, priest and people, to recall their sins. Otherwise, it runs the risk of being simply a recited formula without much substance.

Silence is an important part of prayer in general, and of the prayer of sorrow in particular: *Sacred silence, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. Its purpose, however, depends on the time it occurs in each part of the celebration. Thus within the Act of Penitence, all recollect themselves.* ⁴⁴

A pause at this point assists the assembly in making a brief examination of conscience. Our worship of the all-holy God requires that we do our best to approach the sacred mysteries in holiness and purity of heart: *"To prove my innocence I wash my hands and take my place around Your altar ... Do not sweep me away with sinners ... As for me, I walk the path of perfection. Redeem me and show me Your mercy. My foot stands on level ground: I will bless the Lord in the assembly."* ⁴⁵ Again, we read in Scripture: *"My sacrifice is a contrite spirit; a humbled, contrite heart You will not spurn ... Then You will be pleased with lawful sacrifice."* ⁴⁶

In the *Confiteor* priest and people confess their sins. This public confession is addressed primarily to God and to each other; but it is also addressed to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, to the angels and to all the saints. "The saints" means not only the great historical figures of sanctity, but all the saved, all who have gone home to God, all who already participate in eternal life. ⁴⁷ Thus the Church in heaven prayerfully assists the Church on earth as it continues on its pilgrimage.

Saying the words, *"through my fault ... "* we strike our breast, making a gesture that is both liturgical and scriptural. It is found in the example of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the Temple: *But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"* ⁴⁸ And when Jesus died on the cross, St Luke recounts that the crowd of spectators returned to their homes, *beating their breasts.* ⁴⁹ Since the

Jews understood the heart to be the source and seat of sin, striking the breast could be understood as a visible expression of a genuine consciousness of sin.

The early Church teaches us: *God gives hope to those who have sinned that, when they repent, they will find salvation in their repentance. Let them not despair, let them not abide in their sins, let them not increase them! ... Let them be converted with their whole heart.* ⁵⁰

44 GIRM no 45

45 Psalm 26

46 Psalm 51

47 cf Romano Guardini, *Sacred Symbols* 134

48 Luke 18:13; cf also 23:48

49 Luke 23:48

50 Didascalia 6:81

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Kyrie (Praising Christ's mercy)

*I implore You, my God,
to Whom faith calls us,
hope leads us,
and love unites us:
come to me in Your mercy!*

- Soliloquies 1:3



52. After the Act of Penitence, the Kyrie is always begun, unless it has already been included as part of the Act of Penitence. Since it is a chant by which the faithful acclaim the Lord and implore his mercy, it is ordinarily done by all, that is, by the people and the choir or cantor having a part in it. . . . When the Kyrie is sung as a part of the Act of Penitence, a trope may precede each acclamation.

In the courtyard of the High Priest, St Peter had publicly denied even knowing Jesus of Nazareth. So it must have been a stirring moment when Peter stood before a huge crowd of Jews some fifty days later to proclaim his faith in this same Jesus: *"Let the whole House of Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, Whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* ... *Then those who gladly received his word were baptised; some three thousand souls were added to their number that day.* ⁵¹

The *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy) that is sung or said at Mass is addressed to Jesus as "both Lord and Christ." It is not Trinitarian (addressed to Father, Son and Spirit) but Christological - it is praise given to Jesus.

Nor is it penitential in nature. Rather, it is the logical conclusion of our realisation that, despite our unworthiness, Christ invites us to join Him in offering worship to His Father in the Holy Spirit. Truly, *"His great love is without end ... His mercy endures for ever."* ⁵²

This is not a begging for forgiveness, but a praise of God's love. This is the kind of "mercy" implied by the Greek word *eleison*: "show us Your love."

The second form of the Act of Penitence combines the best elements of the *Confiteor* and the *Kyrie*:

V. *Lord, we have sinned against You; Lord, have mercy.*

R. *Lord, have mercy.*

V. *Lord, show us Your mercy and love.*

R. *And grant us Your salvation.*

The third form of the Act of Penitence includes "tropes" or short invocations which are not self-accusatory statements, but acclamations of praise, such as:

You are mighty God and Prince of peace ... You came to gather the nations into the peace of God's kingdom ... You feed us with Your Body and Blood ... and so on.

In the early Church, deacons sang a litany of invocations or petitions, with the assembly responding: *"To all these petitions which the deacon announces, let the people, especially the children, reply, Kyrie, eleison."* ⁵³

Over the centuries, the litany was abbreviated, with only the *Kyrie* response remaining. This became the rule for centuries. Then a preoccupation with the symbolism of numbers led to a tripling of the *Kyrie*. Various medieval threats such as barbarian invasions, the millennium and the Black Death led people to focus on their sinfulness. Thus the *Kyrie* took on a penitential nature, addressed to the Trinity rather than to Christ alone.

Now we have returned to the original theme of this short litany, acclaiming Jesus for His mercy, and confessing that "*Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*" ⁵⁴

51 Acts of the Apostles 2:36, 41

52 cf Psalm 118:1-3

53 The Apostolic Constitutions, 161

54 Philippians 2:11

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: The Gloria (Giving glory to God)

Those who seek the Lord shall praise Him.

-Confessions 1:1



53. The Gloria is a very ancient and venerable hymn in which the Church, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, glorifies and entreats God the Father and the Lamb. The text of this hymn may not be replaced by any other text. It is sung or said on Sundays outside the Seasons of Advent and Lent, on Solemnities and Feasts, and at special celebrations of a more solemn character.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of goodwill.'" ⁵⁵

Due to its opening line coming from the Gospel account of the angels' announcement to the shepherds in Bethlehem, the *Gloria* is sometimes called The Angelic Hymn. Because it offers praise to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, it is also called the Greater Doxology (compared to the 'Glory be' which is the Lesser Doxology).

By any name, the *Gloria* is one of the greatest hymns produced by Christian poets, and it has been set to music by many composers throughout history. Its prose text is extremely ancient, modeled after the psalms and hymns of the Bible and found in early Syrian and Greek liturgies: *The bishop then addresses the people in these words: "Holy things to the holy." The people are to reply: "One single Holy One, one single Lord, Jesus Christ, Who is blessed forever, to the glory of God the Father. Amen. Glory to God in the highest heaven, on earth peace, among men God's good will."*⁵⁶

About the year 500 it was included in the pope's Midnight Mass at Christmas, and for several centuries was reserved for the exclusive use of the bishop of Rome. Then priests were permitted to use it, but only at the Easter Vigil and on the anniversary of their ordination. Finally, around the 11th or 12th century, its use was extended to all Sunday and feast day Masses outside Advent and Lent, a practice which continues today.

In the Book of Revelation, we are given a glimpse of what the redeemed in heaven are doing: *"They do not rest day or night, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'"*⁵⁷ In the Mass, heaven and earth meet and we join in the song of praise which the blessed are continually offering to the Triune God.

Is this eternal praise of God boring? No, because it is offered by souls in love with God. Those who are in love here on earth do not use stop watches to time their embraces and kisses, nor do lovers time their conversations. Caught up in love, time is of no importance. In heaven, time does not even exist, and everyone finds joy in giving glory and praise to God.

People in love see the good in one another; they compliment and praise one another. We who experience the loving mercy and purifying power of God in the Act of Penitence or Sprinkling Rite find joy in singing the Angelic Hymn, this Greater Doxology.

"Doxology" is Greek for 'words of praise'. In the Greater Doxology we lay aside ourselves and all our interests and glorify the Lord for His own sake, for His power and His glory,⁵⁸ confident that He Who is holy will hear our prayer.



55 Luke 2:13-14

56 The Apostolic Constitutions, 179 – 8:13, 10 - 17

57 Revelation 4:8

58 Nicholas Cabasilas, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, 12

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES: **The Collect**

54. Next the priest invites the people to pray. All, together with the priest, observe a brief silence so that they may be conscious of the fact that they are in God's presence and may formulate their petitions in their hearts and minds. Then the priest says the prayer which is customarily known as the Collect and through which the character of the celebration is expressed. In accordance with the ancient tradition of the Church, the Collect prayer is usually addressed to God the Father, through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and is concluded with a Trinitarian ending.



The priest gives a terse invitation: Let us pray, and we enter into another brief but important moment of silence in the Mass. Unlike the beginning of the Act of Penitence when we recall our sinfulness, this silence invites us to bring to mind our personal needs and those of others. *It is important that our life include times, our day moments of stillness in which we collect ourselves and lay out before our heart the problems which have stirred us during the day. In a word, we must learn again to meditate and to pray.* ⁵⁹

Intercessory prayer, petitioning God on behalf of others, is as old as the Bible itself. Abraham persisted in asking God to spare the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses interceded for the Israelites, who were sometimes in true need but at other times in trouble of their own making. Esther prayed for her fellow Jews to be delivered from their enemies. The examples multiply as one reads the Old Testament.

In the Gospel, Jesus encourages us to pray for our own needs: *“Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive them, and you will have them.”* ⁶⁰ ... *So I say to you; ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”* ⁶¹ And He responded to many requests for help; the ten lepers, the woman with a hemorrhage, the two blind men, and others. ⁶²

In His parable of the rich man and Lazarus, He speaks of praying for others. ⁶³ He often responded to the petitions people made on behalf of others: the centurion for his servant, Martha and Mary for their brother, Jairus for his daughter, the father for his possessed son, and friends bringing to Him a paralysed man. ⁶⁴ St Paul prayed for others and encouraged Christians to do the same. ⁶⁵

After we have prayed in silence, the priest prays on behalf of the assembly, gathering everyone's intentions into one prayer, the Collect. There are usually four parts to this prayer: an invocation of God the Father, the recalling of some deed God has done, the petition of the Church, and the concluding request for the mediation of the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The original Latin collects are jewels of prose composition, notable for their clarity, restraint, style and above all for their doctrinal content. At first hearing or reading, the Collect may seem overly formal and didactic, very unlike the informal and exuberant but lengthy prayers of evangelical Christians.

But as one grows familiar with the restraint that is characteristic of the Roman liturgy, it becomes obvious that the clear-cut, lucidly constructed phrases are full of interior enlightenment. The liturgy as a whole is not favourable to exuberance of feeling. Emotion glows at its depths, but it merely smoulders, like the fiery heart of the volcano whose summit stands out clear and serene against the sky. We are made particularly aware of this at holy Mass ... amongst its prayers are to be found masterpieces of spiritual restraint. The restraint characteristic of the liturgy is at times very pronounced, making this form of prayer appear at first as a frigid intellectual production, until we gradually grow familiar with it and realise what vitality pulsates in the clear, measured forms.⁶⁶

Almighty God says, "Ask what you will," and you might ask for the whole earth, the sea, the air, the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars. They are all beautiful, but they are made by God. Ask for God Himself, and you will have God — Beauty in Itself — and in Him you will possess everything He has made.

- On Psalm 34:1, 12

59 cf Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility*, pp 92-104

60 Mark 11:24

61 Luke 11:9

62 Luke 17:12-19; Mark 5: 25-34; Matthew 9: 27-31

63 Luke 16:27-28

64 Luke 7:1-10, John 11:1-45, Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Luke 9:38-42; Matthew 9:1-8

65 Romans 1:9; 15:30-32; 2 Corinthians 9:14; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:1-4, et al

66 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, no 554

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD: The First Reading

When I was young, I tried to listen to the Scriptures with all the refinement of an intellectual, but without the humility of a true searcher. I was supposed to be knocking at the door so that it would open for me. Instead, I was pushing it closed, trying to understand in pride what is only learned in humility.

- Sermon 51:6



57. In the readings, the table of God's word is prepared for the faithful, and the riches of the Bible are opened to them. Hence, it is preferable to maintain the arrangement of the biblical readings, by which light is shed on the unity of both Testaments and of salvation history. Moreover, it is unlawful to substitute other, non-biblical texts for the readings and responsorial Psalm, which contain the word of God.

The reading of the Gospel is the highlight of the Liturgy of the Word. The reading of the other parts of the New Testament - the Epistles or Letters to the Church, the Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation - are also a part of our heritage. But sometimes people wonder why we read from the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures.

If we are not familiar with the entire context of a passage from the Old Testament, it may be difficult to understand. The prayer of Daniel, for example, doesn't have quite the impact if we don't realise that Daniel is praying whilst alone in the lion's den.

Following ancient tradition, the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays usually begins with a reading from the Old Testament: *Let the reader stand upon some high place. Let him read the books of Moses, of Joshua the son of Nun, of the Judges, and of the Kings and of the Chronicles, and of those written after the Captivity; and, besides these, the books of Job and of Solomon, and of the sixteen prophets.*

⁶⁷ St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) explained this custom in a nutshell: *"In the Old Testament, the New Testament is concealed; in the New Testament, the Old Testament is revealed."* ⁶⁸

Before the Second Vatican Council, there were only two readings on Sundays; the Epistle and the Gospel. Then the Council mandated a change: *"The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years."* ⁶⁹

Thus the Liturgy of the Word includes three readings plus a responsorial psalm. In fact, if one were to attend Mass every Sunday and weekday for the course of a three-year cycle, one would hear most of the Bible proclaimed.

But the Church is a wise teacher and does not simply read the Bible from start to finish. For the Bible is not a one-volume work, but a collection of 73 books of different literary genres or types: history, allegory, poetry, prophecy, and so on. Thus there is a special arrangement of the readings at Mass. The First Reading (usually from the Old Testament, except during Eastertide, when it is from the

Acts of the Apostles) is carefully chosen to introduce us to the Gospel of the day; it is "harmonised" with the Gospel.

For example, on Sunday 3 of Lent (Year C of the three-year cycle), the First Reading is about God revealing Himself to Abraham. The Gospel portrays God revealing Jesus to Peter, James and John as His beloved Son in the Transfiguration. The connection is God's revelation of Himself to us.

Similarly, on Sunday 4 of Lent (Year C), the Gospel describes the woman at the well, and Jesus offering her the water of everlasting life. The First Reading, then, is God's answer to the prayer of Moses, giving water from a rock to the Israelites in the desert. The theme is God's spiritual water that refreshes us.

Preparing for Mass by reading the Scriptures in advance will help us open our hearts to God's word, which is light and life for our souls.

67 The Apostolic Constitutions, 2:57

68 St Augustine, On Catechising the Unlearned, 4:2

69 no.51, Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

LITURGY OF THE WORD: **Responsorial Psalm**

*Dear friends, sing the Psalm with human reason, not like parrots.
They are often taught to say what they do not understand,
but we can know what we are saying, by God's grace.
So we who have learnt to sing about God's works
should be eager to do so, singing together with one voice.*

- On Psalm 18:2



War and peace, love and hate, intrigue and innocence, comedy and tragedy, history and morality, damnation and salvation - all of these are, on one Sunday or another, themes of the First Reading in the Liturgy of the Word.

So many different lessons require a similar variety of responses. That is why the Psalter - the collection of the 150 Hebrew psalms - is an ideal source of prayer material for the Church when she responds to the First Reading. The Responsorial Psalm allows us to express human feelings, longings and reactions that link us to fellow pilgrims down through the centuries.

In ancient Judaism, the singing of the psalms was originally restricted to Temple events; but by the time of Jesus, psalm singing had found a place in the synagogue service as well. Jesus and His family and friends would have known many, if not all, of the psalms by heart. They would have sung them at work and at home, on the way to and from Jerusalem at festival time, and at the key moments of birth, bar mitzvah, marriage and death. The psalms were true prayers for the people.

The psalms are prayers for Christians as well, and they speak to the changing needs of our lives in Christ. There are psalms of despair that turns into hope, psalms of complaint that grows into trust, psalms of fear that settles into peace. Every human emotion, every human experience can be found in the psalms. *"We need only to read the psalms to see humanity as it really is. There the soul is shown as courageous and despondent, happy and sorrowful; full of noble intentions, but of sin and struggles as well, zealous for everything that is good; and then again apathetic and dejected."*⁷⁰

At Mass we usually pray the psalm 'responsorially' - that is, a cantor or reader proclaims the verses, and we respond with a refrain. In the Liturgy of the Hours we usually pray the psalm 'antiphonally' - meaning one side or group sings or reads one verse, while the other 'choir' listens. Then the second side chants the next verse, and the first 'choir' listens. And sometimes it is possible for the entire congregation to pray the entire psalm together in a 'metric' version (a hymn that uses a rhymed text of the psalm).

"God is *King of all the earth; sing to Him a psalm of praise*" ⁷¹ - or of lament, or of petition or contrition. All of our emotions, all of our reasons for praying can be found in the psalms.

The Responsorial Psalm can help us speak to God, sing His praise, and respond to His love.

61. After the First Reading comes the responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance, because it fosters meditation on the word of God. The responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should, as a rule, be taken from the Lectionary. It is preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung. . . If the Psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God.

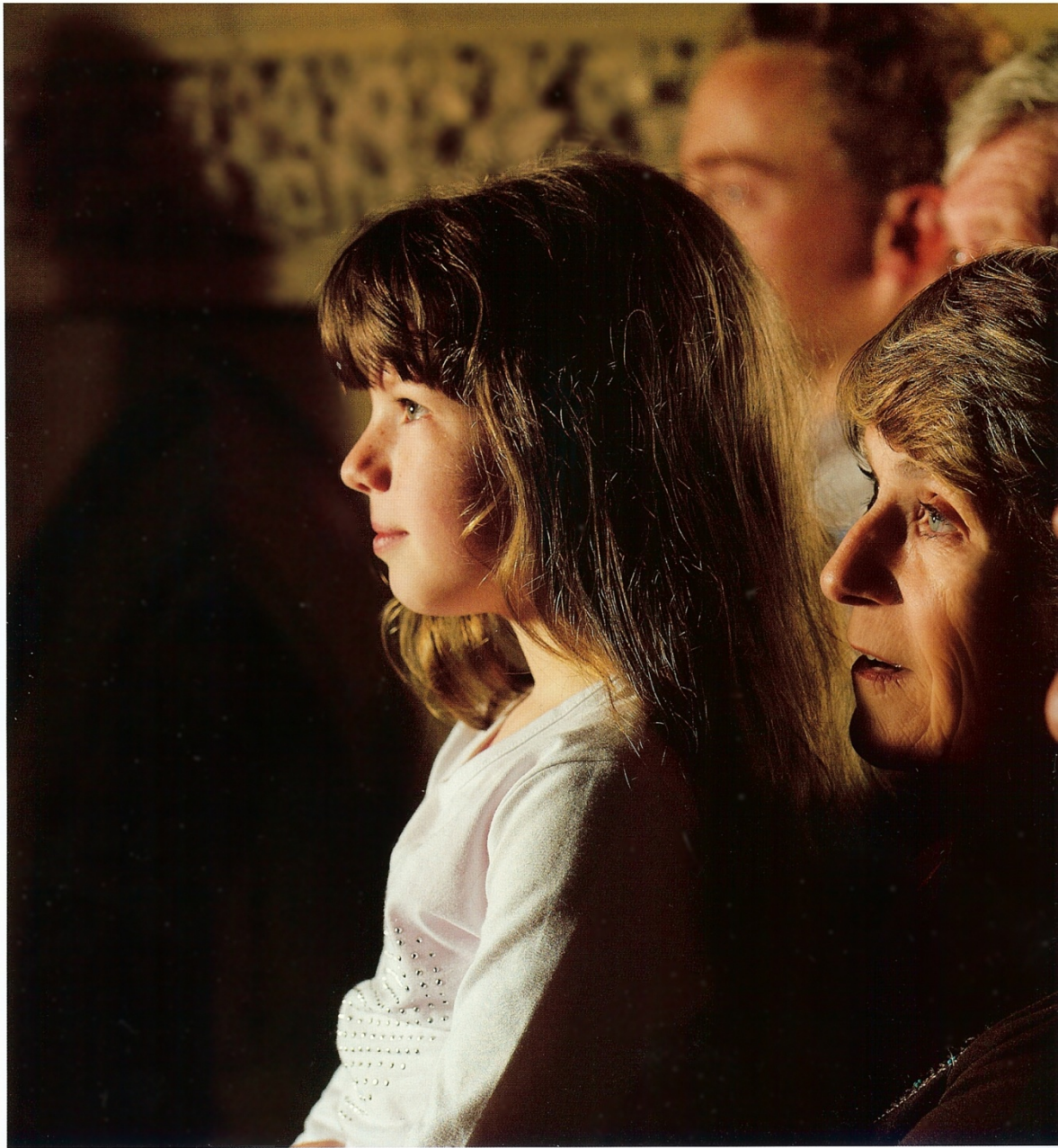
70 Romano Guardini, op cit, p 143

71 Psalm 147:7

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Second Reading

*The depth of the Christian Scriptures is boundless.
If I studied them, and nothing else, all life long,
I would still be making progress
in discovering their treasures.*

- Letter 137:3



In the Jewish synagogue service, in addition to readings from the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible) the 'Writings' (the historical books and Wisdom literature) and the books of the Prophets of Israel were read. Catholics usually read from these scriptures in the First Reading.

For the Second Reading of the Liturgy of the Word, however, we turn to our own Christian 'prophets' - the letters of Saints Peter, Paul, James, John, Jude. This reading was formerly called the Epistle; but that designation falls short of including other books of the New Testament that may be read at this point of the Mass: the Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation) or the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Eastern Churches, the reading before the Gospel is simply called 'the Apostle', a designation suitable for all the books of the New Testament that come down to us from the Apostles. In reading from these books, we continue the tradition described by St Justin Martyr: *The Memoirs of the Apostles or the Writings of me Prophets are read for as long as time allows.* ⁷²

The Second Reading is normally a "consecutive" reading. In other words, St Paul's Letter to the Colossians may be read, chapter by chapter (or nearly so) for five or six Sundays in succession; then a new epistle is begun and read to the end.

Unlike the First Reading, which is chosen to complement the Gospel, the Second Reading usually stands on its own. During Ordinary Time, most of an epistle, or even all of it, may be read chapter by chapter, Sunday after Sunday, until it is completed; then another epistle is read. Thus the Second Reading may not be thematically linked to the First Reading, Psalm and Gospel.

But in the major liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and on solemnities, the Second Reading is selected to correspond with the mystery or event being celebrated. For example, during the Christmas season we read the First Letter of St John, chapter by chapter. This letter recalls the mystery of God's love for us made incarnate in Christ.

In the First Reading, we reflect upon the triumph and tragedy of the People of Israel as they struggled to hear and practise the Covenant between God and themselves. In the Second Reading, we encounter the early Church, the New Israel, living its Christian faith as a pilgrim people.

When Paul or Peter, James or John or Jude teach, exhort or even reprimand our forebears in the Faith, we ask ourselves if we are doing any better today than they did then. And when the early Christian community is praised for its faith, hope and charity, we can examine ourselves to see if we are adding 'grace upon grace' ⁷³ as we take our place in the long procession of men, women and children who have 'heard the Word of God and acted upon it'. ⁷⁴

29. When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, all must listen with reverence to the readings from God's word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy. Although in the readings from Sacred Scripture God's word is addressed to all people of every era and is understandable to them, nevertheless, a fuller understanding and a greater effectiveness of the word is fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, the Homily, as part of the liturgical action.

72 St Justin Martyr, Apologia 1, 67

73 John 1:16

74 cf Luke 11:28

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Gospel Acclamation

*Love is the only sign
that distinguishes the children of God.
To show their love,
let them all sign themselves with the Cross of Christ,
let them all sing: "Alleluia!"*

- Sermon on I John 5:7



While everyone attending the Jewish Sabbath service remains standing, the *hazzan* or leader of the synagogue pulls aside the veil of the niche where the ark or chest containing the *Torah* scrolls is kept. With the congregation singing a joyful '*Hallelujah!*' (Hebrew for 'praise God'), the leader ceremoniously carries the large scrolls to the *bema* or platform, removes the two outer wrappings of the scroll, and places them on a reading stand or table.

Alleluia is a Hebrew word. It combines the imperative verb *hallelū* ('praise') and the word *Yah*, a shortened form of *Yahweh*, the name of God. It is used frequently in the Psalms, and the early Christians continued to sing *Alleluia* as an acclamation of praise. In the Apocalypse, the blessed in heaven are continually singing *Alleluia* before the throne of God. ⁷⁵

The Church Father Tertullian (c 160-220) tells us that Christians added the word to many of their prayers after the final Amen. ⁷⁶ And St Benedict (c 480-546) in his Rule for monasteries says that "*Alleluia often serves as an acclamation during the procession for the gospel...*" ⁷⁷

Alleluia was so familiar to the people that it was used not only in worship, but sometimes as a war cry, a warning signal, a magical word, a joyous exclamation, a song of ploughmen and boatmen, and even to sing babies to sleep in the nursery.

"*A Christian is an Alleluia from head to toe*". This saying is attributed to St Augustine (354-430), but some research of his writings produced only one quotation of his that comes anywhere close to the banner quote. It is this: "*Tota actio nostra, amen et alleluia erit*"... "*Our entire activity will be 'Amen' and 'Alleluia'*". ⁷⁸ However, here Augustine is talking about what our lives will be like in heaven. He explains that in eternity we will be totally united to God's will ('Amen') and we will be continually praising Him ('Alleluia'). Augustine comments on the word *Alleluia* in many sermons (e.g., 254, 256, 362).

Something that St Augustine did say is this: "*We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song.*" ⁷⁹ Since every Sunday is 'a little Easter', it is fitting that the quintessential Easter acclamation should announce the presence of the Risen Christ as He speaks to us in His Gospel. *For the Church, the Gospel book is a verbal icon of Christ's manifestation to and presence among us. Above all, it is an icon of His Resurrection ... It is the image of the appearance of the Risen Lord in*

fulfillment of His promise: "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there am I in the midst of them." ⁸⁰

The absence of the *Alleluia* during the season of Lent reminds us of our need for redemption in Christ, which we will celebrate with great solemnity at Easter, when *Alleluia* is once again our song.



62. After the reading that immediately precedes the Gospel, the *Alleluia* or another chant indicated by the rubrics is sung, as required by the liturgical season. An acclamation of this kind constitutes a rite or act in itself, by which the assembly of the faithful welcomes and greets the Lord who is about to speak to it in the Gospel and professes its faith by means of the chant. It is sung by all while standing and is led by the choir or a cantor, being repeated if this is appropriate. The verse, however, is sung either by the choir or by the cantor. The *Alleluia* is sung in every season other than Lent. During Lent, in place of the *Alleluia*, the verse before the Gospel is sung.

75 cf Revelation 19

76 Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 27

77 St Benedict, *Rule for Monasteries*, 19

78 St Augustine, *Sermon 362,29* (PL 38:1224)

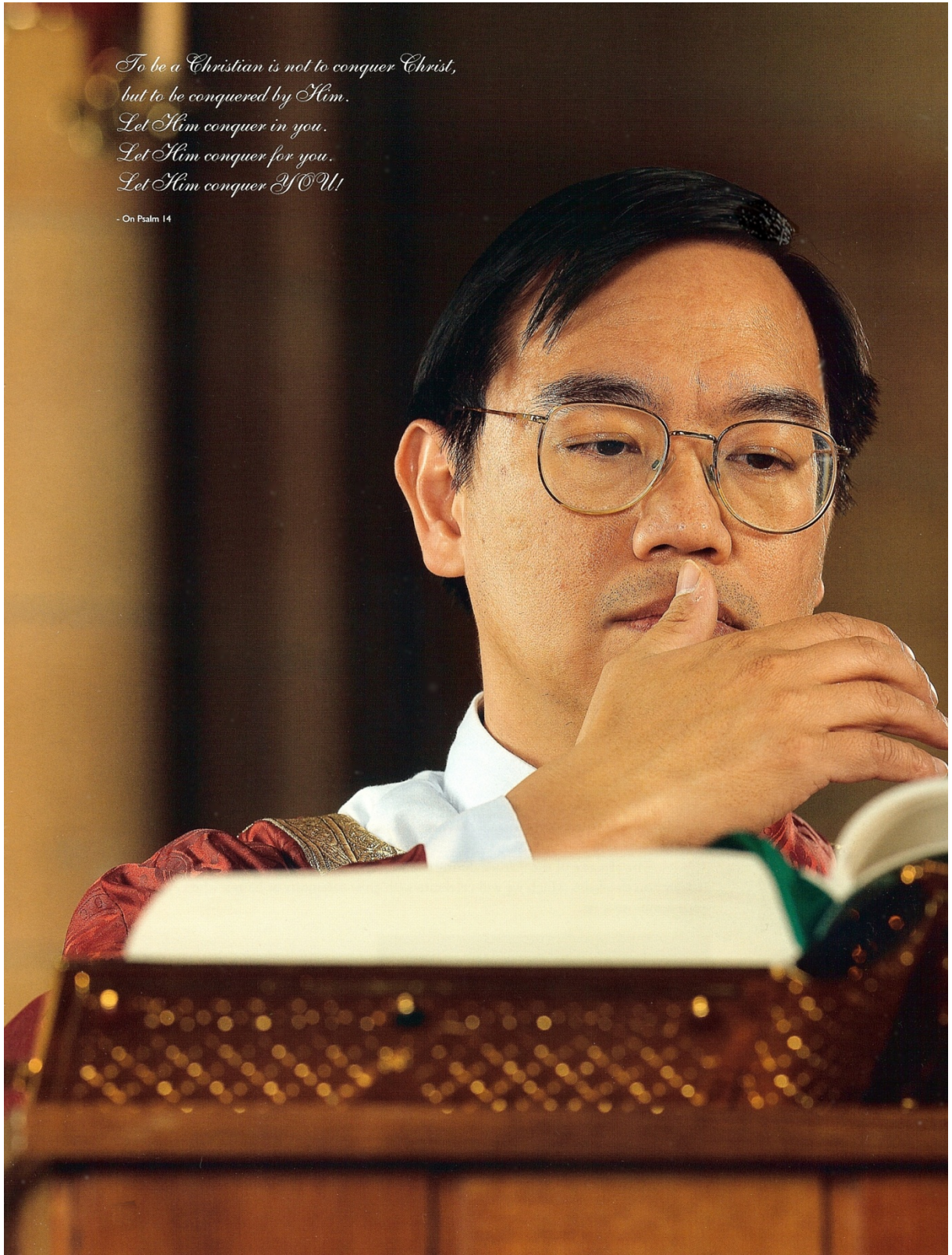
79 attributed to St Augustine; cf *Sermon 362:29*; *Exposition on Psalm 148*

80 Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, p_

LITURGY OF THE WORD: **The Gospel: Welcoming the Good News into our lives**

*To be a Christian is not to conquer Christ,
but to be conquered by Him.
Let Him conquer in you.
Let Him conquer for you.
Let Him conquer YOU!*

- On Psalm 14



Whilst the assembly is singing the Gospel Acclamation, the deacon or priest who will proclaim the Gospel bows and prays that his heart and lips may be purified by the Lord, ⁸¹ so that he may worthily proclaim the words of Jesus.

Then he solemnly carries the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo. This movement may become a short procession that includes ministers carrying lights and incense, arriving at the ambo as the Acclamation ends. This is in keeping with ancient tradition:

The early Christians expressed honour for the physical presence of the Scriptures ... It was a book containing the Scriptures that was placed upon the altar to represent the presence of Christ in the church throughout the day ... Starting about 1150 in the West, people began to pay honour to the Eucharist in the way they previously had honoured the Scriptures: carrying them in procession, exposing them for veneration, putting them in a central place in the church on the altar, and showing outward signs of reverence to them by genuflecting and bowing ...

(But) the main honour that should be paid to the Scriptures is to hear them and obey them as the Word of God. The external expressions of honour to the book, however, are important because they force us as human beings to realise what we think of the Scriptures inside. ⁸²

As the Acclamation is sung and the Book of the Gospels is brought to the ambo, the assembly stands. This is one sign of faith that Christ Himself is present, speaking through the Gospel. The people's responses at the beginning and conclusion of the Gospel are also important to consider: "*Glory to You, Lord*" and "*Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*". Unlike the response "*Thanks be to God*" given at the conclusion of the other readings, the Gospel responses are directly addressed to Christ in the belief that He is present.

Using his thumb, the deacon or priest signs the Gospel text with a cross, and then signs his forehead, lips and heart. It is as if he wants to impress the very ink of the text upon his senses. Imitating his action, the members of the assembly sign themselves, silently welcoming the Good News into their thinking, speaking and loving. In so doing, we link ourselves to an ancient custom: *At all times be ready to sign yourselves carefully on the forehead ... When we make the Sign (of the*

Cross) on our foreheads and our eyes, we drive away him who seeks to destroy us.

83

We stand arrayed like soldiers, singing our *Alleluia* battle cry, arming ourselves with the protection of the Cross, ready to hear our Commander's orders. Indeed, it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself Who speaks to us now, and Who wants to 'conquer in us and for us.'

133. If the Book of the Gospels is on the altar, the priest then takes it and goes to the ambo, carrying the Book of the Gospels slightly elevated and preceded by the lay ministers, who may carry the thurible and the candles. Those present turn towards the ambo as a sign of special reverence for the Gospel of Christ.

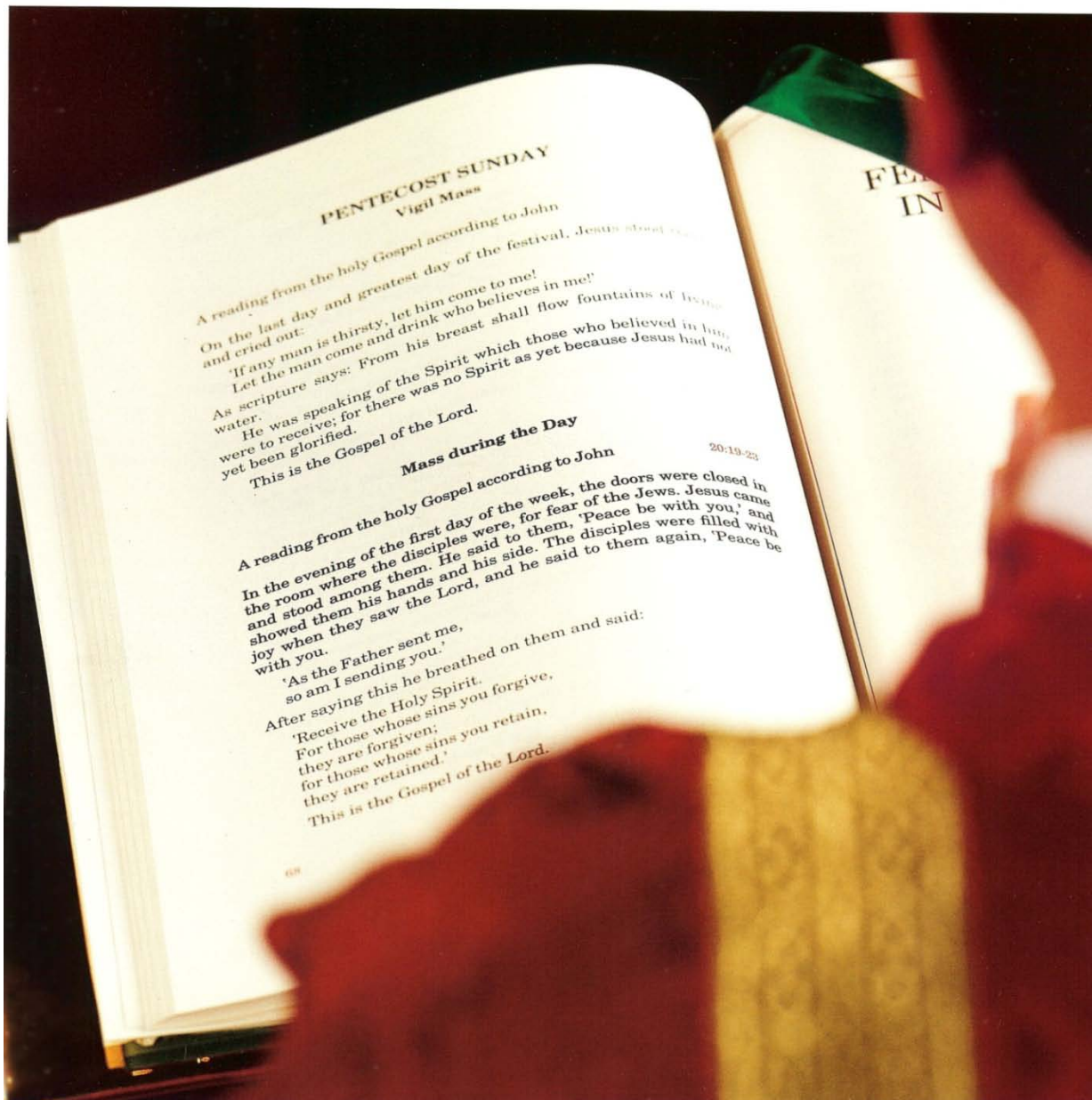
81 cf Isaiah 6:5-7

82 Romano Guardini, *Church & Eucharist*, 71

83 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 99-104

LITURGY OF THE WORD – The Gospel (Proclaiming Christ's Message)

*If you believe what you like in the Gospels,
and reject what you don't like,
it is not the Gospel you believe,
but yourself.*



When the *Torah* or Law of Moses is read in the Jewish synagogue, the *hazzan* (synagogue leader) points out to the reader the section of the Law that is appointed to be read that day, since it is divided into sections to ensure that the entire Law is read in three years. Thus the Catholic liturgy has a three-year cycle of Gospel readings, with their complementary first and second readings.

The *Torah* passage is first read in ancient Hebrew, and then translated line by line into the vernacular language. Since the reader can be any male member of the synagogue who is thirteen or older, the *hazzan* stands by the reader to correct any errors he might make. Further, lest the reader's hands soil the *Torah* scroll itself, a pointer is used to assist the reader in following the text.

This care for the proclamation of God's Word can serve as an admirable example for all readers of Scripture, but especially for the one who proclaims the Gospel, Christ's Law of love. There is no *hazzan* visible at the side of the Gospel reader. But the Church ensures that Christ's message is faithfully transmitted to His people by issuing approved translations of the sacred texts. That is why it is of the utmost importance that all readers, cleric and lay, read the Scriptures exactly as they appear in the liturgical books, without in any way changing the words to suit their own preferences.

Likewise, it is important for those who hear the Scriptures to be guided by the understanding of the Church's constant Tradition, handed on through the centuries, and not re-interpret them to suit the passing trends of the times. Otherwise, the word of God is in danger of becoming our own word, constantly changing to suit our own needs - or to allow us to avoid being confronted by the need for conversion.

Allowing the Gospel to sink into our lives not only requires letting go of the preconceived notions that dominate our thoughts, our words and our emotions, but also calls for an act of faith. Jesus tells us evil forces do not wish for us to give our assent. For this reason it is customary to make the Sign of the Cross (a way of thwarting evil) over our foreheads, over our lips, and over our hearts in preparation to truly hear the Gospel. ⁸⁴

The proclamation of the Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. Likewise, it should be a highpoint in the life of the Christian. For if we believe that the Gospel is the word of Christ Himself, and if we believe that Christ is the Son of God Who became flesh to show us how to live, then we - reader and listener - should be attentive.

For the word which Christ brought and which is set down in this book we are willing to stand up with a mind that is open; we are ready to confess it with our mouth; and above all we are determined to safeguard it faithfully in our hearts.

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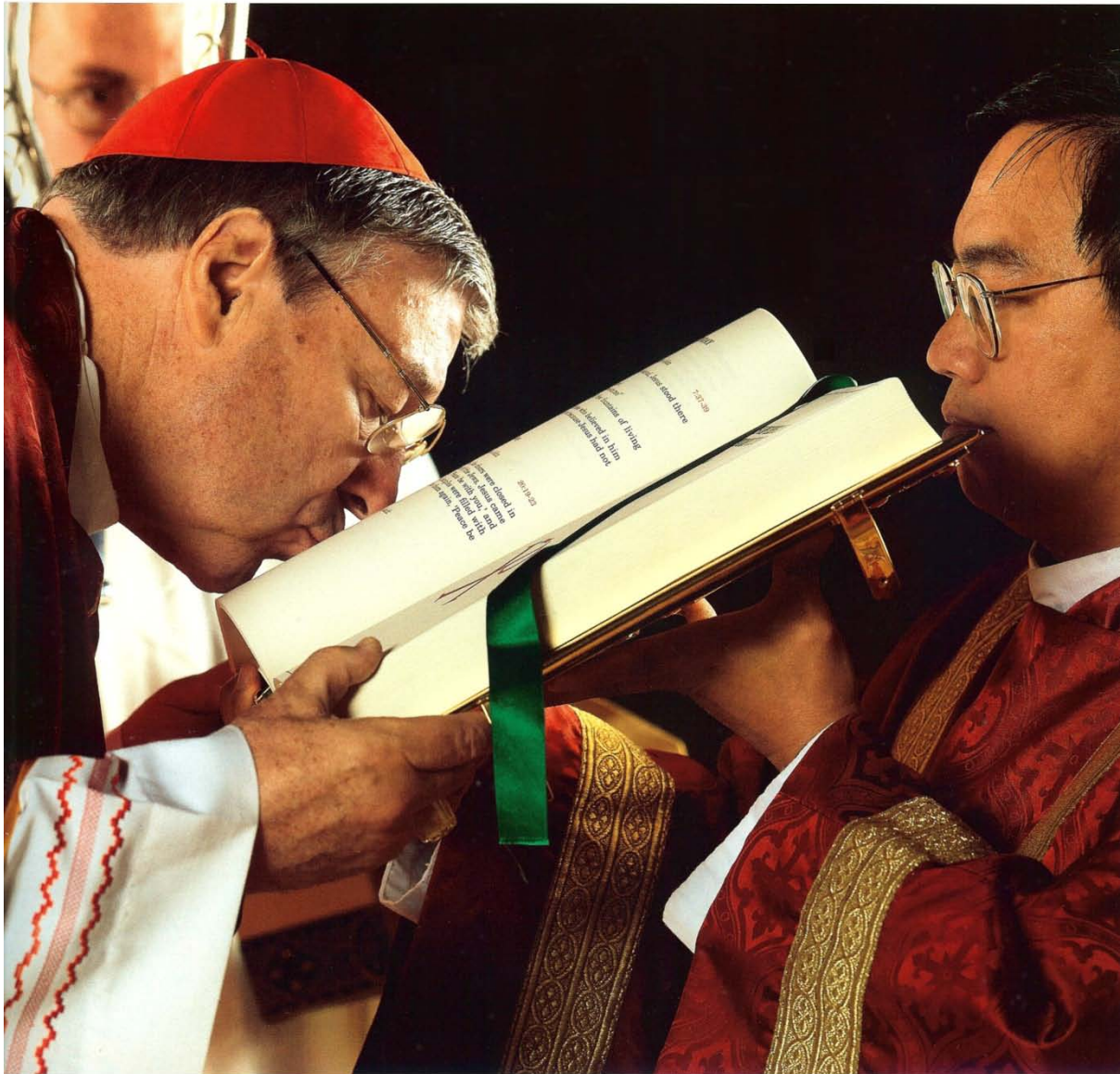
84 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 36

85 Michael Dubruiel, The How-To Book of the Mass, pp 120-121

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The Gospel :Sealed with a Kiss

*It is so easy to listen to Christ,
so convenient to praise the Gospels
and so nice to acclaim the preacher.
But to endure to the end – that really means
responding to the voice of the Shepherd.*

-- On John's Gospel 45:13



134....The priest kisses the book, saying quietly: *Per evangelica dicta* (Through the words of the Gospel ...)

Christianity took root in Mediterranean societies - first Palestine, then Turkey, Greece and Rome. For these cultures, kissing has different meanings: yes, it can be romantic, but it more often symbolises friendship, affection, congratulations, respect and reverence - all forms of love.

The 'liturgical kiss' is a part of Catholic ritual from apostolic times: *Greet one another with a holy kiss.*⁸⁶ But its meaning is seldom appreciated in societies where anything other than 'romantic kissing' is seen as 'something foreigners do', and where even some fathers hesitate to kiss their own sons after they reach a certain age.

We can see the liturgical kiss at Mass when the priest bends down and kisses the altar of sacrifice; and when the deacon, priest or bishop kisses the Gospel text that has been proclaimed. Similarly, the laity are invited to kiss the Cross on Good Friday, and they may kiss the relic of a saint that is presented for veneration on a special occasion. And as has been mentioned, the 'sign of peace' was originally the 'kiss of peace'.

Is this 'sentimental' kissing really so foreign to us? Perhaps not, if we consider the fact that we may have, behind closed doors, kissed the photograph of a loved one who is away on a journey, or priest who has died. There are even those who have rolled over in bed to kiss the pillow of a spouse who is away. It's the next best thing.

Likewise, at the conclusion of the Gospel reading, the deacon or priest proclaims, 'The Gospel of the Lord.' Christ Himself has spoken to us, and the reader is moved to kiss the very text, saying quietly as he does so, 'By the words of the Gospel may our sins be blotted out.'

The message he has proclaimed is powerful, salvific and life-giving. It requires a response, which will come in the Homily that will guide our personal resolutions to be more faithful to the Lord's message. But first, a kiss.

This kiss isn't simply decorative, nor is it pious nonsense or mere sentiment. It is a powerful action that tells us that something great has occurred: Christ Himself has spoken His word to us. He has taught us, consoled us, challenged us, strengthened us. We are saved by His holy Gospel, His Good News - and that is worth a kiss, and even more: it is worth our lives.

LITURGY OF THE WORD – The Homily

*O Lord, You have inspired faith in me
by the Incarnation of Your Son
and through the ministry of Your preacher.*

– Confessions 1:1



65. The Homily is part of the Liturgy and is strongly recommended, for it is necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be an exposition of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners... After the Homily a brief period of silence is appropriately observed.

When the Jews of Jesus' time gathered for a synagogue service, they first listened to the *Torah* reading assigned to that day. Six other readings and commentaries followed, with the last always being taken from the Prophets and reflecting the theme of the *Torah* passage. The text was brief, no more than three verses, and was the only one chosen beforehand by the reader himself. Then the reader gave a spontaneous commentary on what he had just read. The man who did this was said to perform *maphtir*; thus Jesus one day, in the synagogue of Nazareth, performed *maphtir*.⁸⁷

Although He could have chosen three verses, Jesus chose only two - Isaiah 61:1-2. St Luke describes for us the usual synagogue practice: *He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down ... Then He began to speak to them.* Any male who was of age could preach in the synagogue. However, orthodox Jews were thoroughly schooled in the scriptures and their interpretation, and were always guided by the *rabbi* (teacher) and the *hazzan* (synagogue leader).

Christians continued to follow the Jewish practice of preaching following the readings, although from the beginning this ministry was restricted to the clergy: *When the reader has finished, the presider speaks, exhorting us to live by these noble teachings.*⁸⁸

The Greek word *homilia* means 'instruction' or 'informal discourse', while the Latin word *sermo* means 'talk' or 'conversation'. Some think there is no real distinction.

But in the homilies of the early Church Fathers that have come down to us, we can see the difference. A homily not only explains the Scriptures and applies them to our lives; it actually weaves the scriptural text into the whole, so that the homilist's text strongly relies on the Scriptures. This requires research and preparation, and a good familiarity with scriptural texts, so there is a coherent flow from scripture to homiletic comment and instruction.

A sermon, on the other hand, is generally seen as more of an exhortation that may have a scriptural text as its starting point but does not heavily rely on Scripture throughout. Sometimes a sermon has little or nothing to do with the Scriptures just read in Mass.

The Second Vatican Council restored preaching to its rightful place in the liturgy, and recommended that preaching follow the homiletic model: *A fuller understanding and a greater effectiveness of the word is fostered by a living commentary on the word, that is, the Homily, as part of the liturgical action.* ⁸⁹

It is mandated that *there is to be a Homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation at all Masses that are celebrated with the participation of a congregation; it may not be omitted without a serious reason. It is recommended on other days.* ⁹⁰ In keeping with ancient Church practice, the Homily is given by an ordained cleric (bishop, priest or deacon) but never a lay person. ⁹¹

A major part of the ministry of Jesus was preaching. At His trial, Jesus stated: *"I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple ... "* ⁹² Walking along with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, *He explained to them the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about Himself.* ⁹³

The Homily, then, is an opportunity for the ordained minister to follow in the footsteps of the Master and 'break open the Word', that everyone attending Mass can more fully recognise Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread. ⁹⁴

87 Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12

88 Luke 4:16-30

89 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 67

90 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, nos 7,33,52; and the General Instruction on the Roman Missal, 2007 edition no. 29

91 cf. GIRM no.66, Code of Canon Law no. 767.1

92 John 18:20

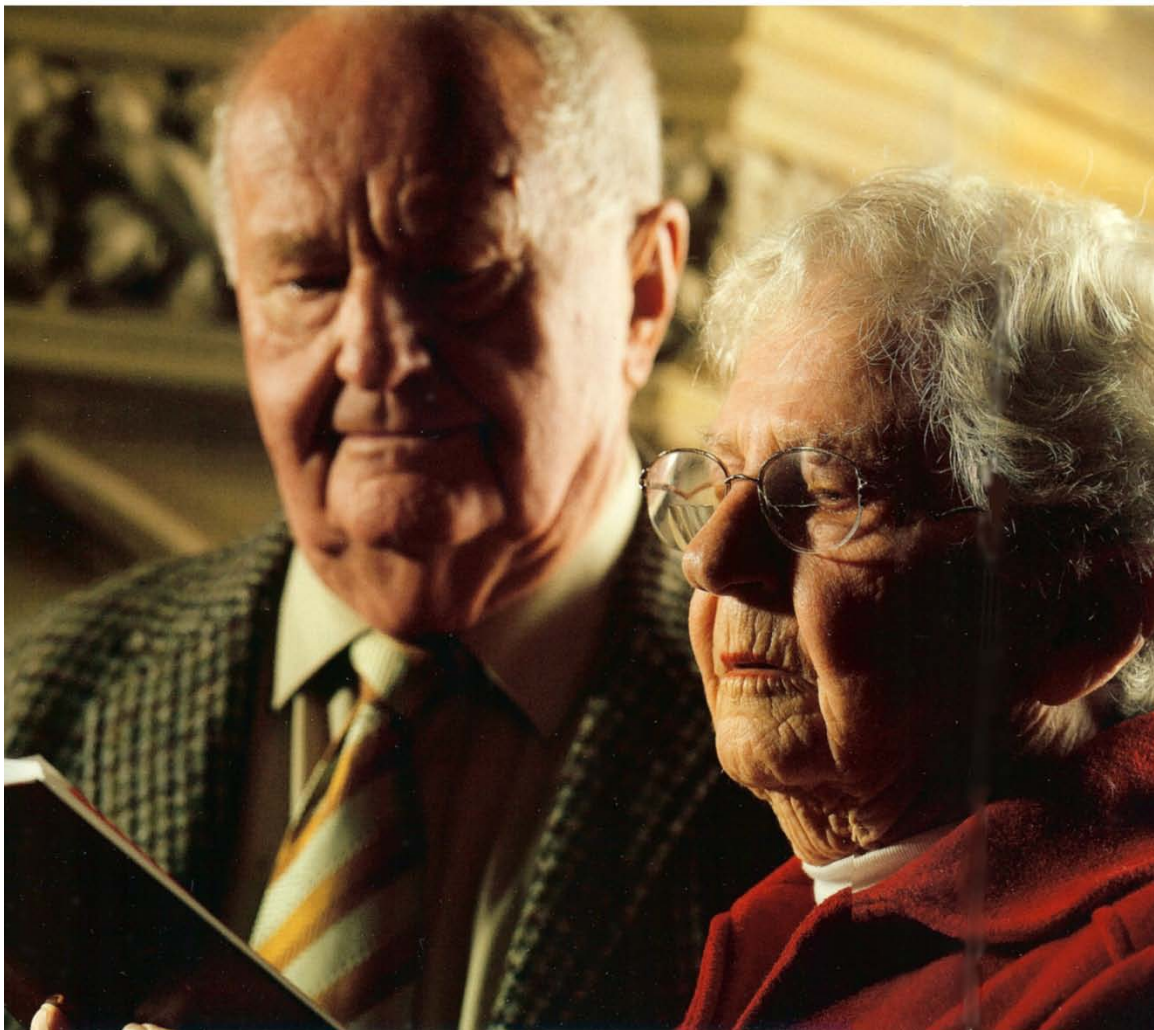
93 Luke 24:27

94 cf Luke 24:35

LITURGY OF THE WORD – The Credo: Each One's Profession of Faith

*When we see God,
we shall not have to say the Creed.
Our vision of God
will reward us for our present faith.*

- Sermon 8.13



After the homily, the assembly stands to proclaim its faith as a united community. However, each member of the assembly renews this commitment individually: the Latin verb Credo means "I believe," not "We believe."

The years immediately following the Second Vatican Council saw a strong emphasis upon the Mass as a communal celebration, as a community meal.

However, in any contractual agreement or legal document, each party must sign individually. In the taking of an oath, even when taken in a group, the response is always "I do", not "We do". Likewise, at a wedding, the rubric (liturgical directive) at the questioning of the spouses regarding their intentions in entering marriage states: *Each answers the questions separately*. The bride and groom come to the altar as a couple, but they make their promises as individuals, each saying, "I do."

This background can help us understand why the Profession of Faith begins, "I believe in one God." We proclaim our faith together as a community, but each member of the Church confesses the faith individually. *When we read the prayers of the Mass ... we notice that the word I appears very seldom, and never without a special reason. It is found quite clearly (in the Confiteor) when each one present acknowledges his sins; in the prayers immediately before Holy Communion; and in the Credo, when the individual, conscious of his personal responsibility, expresses his belief in divine revelation.*⁹⁵

What is that revelation? That there is one true God. Our Profession of Faith is a direct descendant of the moment in the Jewish synagogue service when the people proclaim the Shema': "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one God ... " ⁹⁶ But as Christians we acknowledge our faith in the truth that the Gospels have revealed: that the one true God exists as a community of three distinct but inseparable Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the early Church, the Profession of Faith was not made every Sunday, but was mainly associated with Baptism: *We invoke upon the one who is enlightened and purified the Name of Jesus Christ , Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate; and of the Holy Spirit, Who foretold the whole story of Jesus through the Prophets .*⁹⁷ As the candidate was immersed three times, or water was poured three times over the candidate, the baptising minister asked the now familiar questions: *Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord ... ? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church ... ?* To each question, the candidate responded, "I do."

We first encounter these questions in the *Apostolic Tradition* of St Hippolytus of Rome (c 215); they are the direct origin of what is known today as the Apostles' Creed. The Nicene Creed we profess on Sundays was composed at two Councils of the Church: at Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

The very precise nature of the Creed underscores the fact that our belief is not an opinion. As individuals and as a people, we put all our faith in God. The Creed expresses our absolute trust in the one God Who created, redeemed and sanctifies us as individual members of one Church.

67. The purpose of the *Symbolum* or Profession of Faith, or Creed, is that the whole gathered people may respond to the word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the Homily and that they may also call to mind and confess the great mysteries of the faith by reciting the rule of faith in a formula approved for liturgical use, before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist.

68. The Creed is to be sung or said by the priest together with the people on Sundays and Solemnities. It may be said also at particular celebrations of a more solemn character.

95 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 99-104

96 Deuteronomy 6:5ff

97 St Justin Martyr, *op cit*, 61

LITURGY OF THE WORD: The General Intercessions

*Extend your love over the whole earth
if you desire to love Christ,
for Christ's members are all over the earth.*

— Sermon on I John 10:7



When our Jewish brethren gather for worship in the synagogue, they pray a series of eighteen 'benedictions' or blessings, asking God to respond to their needs. Some of these are individual while others are for the local faith community, the Jews in the 'Diaspora' (dispersal around the globe) and the world in general.

These eighteen blessings are also prayed by Jewish men as part of their daily morning prayers. Jesus would have learned them as a boy from St Joseph, and they would have prayed them standing in the doorway of their home in Nazareth, facing south toward Jerusalem. Later, Jesus would have prayed the blessings every morning with His apostles.

St Justin Martyr, describing the liturgy of the 2nd century, tells us: *We pray fervently for ourselves ... and for people everywhere, in whatever place they may be.* ⁹⁸

The catechumens, those who were studying the Faith and were not as yet baptised, were not allowed to be present for the prayers and were dismissed after the reading of the Gospel. Thus the list of petitions, prayed only by those who professed the Faith, came to be known as the Prayer (not 'prayers') of the Faithful.

This prayer is described in detail in the early 5th century Apostolic Constitutions: *The deacon says, "Let no one come near who does not have the right. Let us all, the faithful, kneel. Let us pray to God through His Christ; let all of us beseech God fervently: for the peace and tranquility of the world and the holy churches ... for those who are afflicted by sickness ... for those who are traveling by land or sea ... for those condemned to the mines, to exile, to prison and fetters for the sake of the Name of the Lord ... for those who are outside the Church and astray ... for the children in the Church ... for one another ... for every departed Christian soul ... "* ⁹⁹ Because the prayer intentions covered a variety of needs, most of which were for people beyond the local community, they were also called the Universal Prayer, or the General Intercessions.

At first the petitions were quite lengthy. A form of this type of prayer is retained in the Solemn Prayers of Good Friday. It was the influence of the Eastern Church which led to shortening the petitions into the form of a litany - brief sentences to which the people respond, "*Kyrie, eleison!*" "Lord, have mercy!" The General

Intercessions gradually disappeared from the Roman liturgy altogether, leaving only a very brief *Kyrie* litany at the start of Mass. The liturgical renewal inaugurated by Vatican Council II returned the Prayer of the Faithful to the liturgy.

The nature of this prayer requires that the intercessions include intentions that are global, since ours is a 'catholic' or 'universal' Church. *Individuals must shake off the narrow trammels of their own thoughts, and make a far more comprehensive world of ideas their own: they must go beyond their little personal aims and adopt the educative purpose of the great fellowship of the liturgy. It goes without saying, therefore, that they are obliged to ... ask for things which do not directly concern them; they must espouse and plead before God causes which do not affect them personally, and which merely arise out of the needs of the community at large ...*¹⁰⁰

69. In the General Intercessions or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in a certain way to the word of God which they have welcomed in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all. It is fitting that such a prayer be included, as a rule, in Masses celebrated with a congregation, so that petitions will be offered for the holy Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for all men and women, and for the salvation of the whole world.

70. As a rule, the series of intentions is to be:

- a. for the needs of the Church;
- b. for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c. for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d. for the local community.

Nevertheless, in a particular celebration, such as Confirmation, Marriage, or a Funeral, the series of intentions may reflect more closely the particular occasion.

98 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65:1

99 The Apostolic Constitutions, VII, 10, 1-22

100 Romano Guardini, The Spirit of the Liturgy, pp 141-149

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Preparing the Altar**



The spreading of special table linens upon the dining room table is a sign that company is coming, and a great meal is being planned. Similarly, the sacred linens used at Mass, and the care used in preparing the altar, are signs that a special Guest is being invited into our assembly, and He is providing us with a Banquet beyond compare.

The Mass, although a ritual meal, is not an informal affair. St Thomas Aquinas reminds us that the Mass is a *sacred Banquet, in which Christ is received, the memory of His Passion is renewed, the soul is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us!* ¹⁰¹

The Last Supper, being a highly ritualised meal, would have been dignified with special linens and vessels. To this day, observant Jews have linens and dishes reserved solely for the annual celebration of the Passover Seder. In the same way, Catholics set aside special vessels and linens for use in divine worship.

The Church Fathers tell us that linen was used from the earliest times: "*What Christian is unaware that in celebrating the sacred Mysteries the wood (of the altar) is covered with a linen cloth?*" ¹⁰² And again: "*He (Pope Sylvester I, r 314-335) decreed that the Sacrifice should not be celebrated upon a silken or dyed*

cloth, but only on linen, sprung from the earth, as the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ was buried in a clean linen shroud." ¹⁰³

Coloured hangings over the sides of the altar can highlight a season or feast, but the Church prescribes that the altar cloth covering the mensa or altar table must be white ¹⁰⁴ and that the altar cloth and the corporal should be separate altar linens. ¹⁰⁵

The pall (from the Latin *palla*, 'cover') is a stiff square of linen which is placed upon the chalice to keep dust and insects from falling into the chalice and its contents.

The corporal (from the Latin *corpus*, 'body') has its name in common with the military rank of corporal, originally an army commander's personal bodyguard. Eucharistic vessels are always placed upon a corporal (more than one if necessary), but never simply upon the larger altar cloth. This is out of reverence for small particles of the consecrated Host, or even entire Hosts, that may fall upon the corporal during the Breaking of the Bread or the transfer of communion Hosts from one vessel to another.

If not detected during Mass, particles will at least be collected and preserved upon the corporal. When the folded corporal is returned to the sacristy, these particles will be disposed of reverently rather than left lying upon the altar. Altar linens are rinsed in the *sacrarium*, a special sink in the sacristy whose drain goes directly into the ground rather than into the common sewer. ¹⁰⁶

Also placed upon the altar are the purifier or purificator, a linen napkin used for wiping the lips and cleansing the sacred vessels; and the Missal, the book of Mass prayers.

A young man takes his beloved to an expensive meal in a first-class restaurant, complete with white linen and candles, when he is going to ask her to be his bride. In the same way, we - the Bride - are being invited to a wedding Feast at Mass, a sacred Banquet. The meal is indeed expensive, for the price is Christ's own precious Blood.

73. At the beginning of the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts, which will become Christ's Body and Blood, are brought to the altar. First, the altar, the Lord's table, which is the centre of the whole Liturgy of the Eucharist, is prepared by placing on it the corporal, purificator, Missal and chalice (unless the chalice is prepared at the credence table).

- 101 St Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers of Corpus Christi
- 102 St Optatus of Milevis, Against the Donatists, 6:2
- 103 Liber Pontificalis
- 104 GIRM no. 297
- 105 GIRM no. 334; cf 280
- 106 GIRM nos. 170, 304

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Collection

Charity, as St Paul writes, "is not self-seeking", meaning that it places the common good before its own, not its own before the common good. So whenever you show greater concern for the common good than for your own, you may know that you are growing in charity.

-- Rule for Monasteries 5:2



73. It is well that money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, should be received. These are to be put in a suitable place but away from the Eucharistic table.

There is one part of the Sunday Eucharist that has not changed from apostolic times, and of this the Church can be justly proud.

The Consecration? No - some ancient liturgies don't even include the words of institution. The readings? No - for several centuries there were arguments about what could or could not be read. The elements - bread and wine, certainly; but some places in ancient times included milk and honey at liturgies of Christian initiation.

The part that has never changed is the collection; it is an apostolic tradition. Writing to the Christians in Corinth, St Paul gives this directive: *Now in regard to the collection for the holy ones you also should do as I ordered the churches of Galatia. On the first day of the week each of you should set aside and save whatever one can afford ... And when I arrive, I shall send with letters of recommendation those whom you have approved to take your gracious gift to Jerusalem.* ¹⁰⁷

That this practice continued from apostolic times can be seen in St Justin Martyr's words: *The wealthy among us help the needy, and we always lend one another assistance ... Those who desire to make gifts, each just as he wishes. These gifts are collected and handed over to the presider. It is he who assists the orphans and widows, those who are in want through sickness or for some other reason, prisoners, strangers passing through; briefly, he helps all who are in need.* ¹⁰⁸

It is one of the most ancient customs of the Church for the people themselves to provide the bread and wine for the Eucharist. Over time, they also brought oil, candles, wheat, grapes, and other items needed for liturgical rites. Money and food, used to sustain both the clergy and the poor, were also brought forward at the Offertory.

In former times, however, these gifts were not brought directly to the priest, but placed on tables or ledges in the transepts, to the left and right of the altar. Deacons would then bring whatever was needed to the altar for consecration; during the week, they would distribute the other goods and money as needed. It was to these tables that the people returned at Communion time, to receive the Eucharist. The tables developed into the Communion rails we still see in many older churches today. Thus the rails were not 'barriers' between the clergy and laity, but 'meeting points' which helped provide a focus for orderly processions at Offertory and Communion times.

Today, the money that is collected at Mass supplies the operational needs of the parish, sustains the clergy, and assists the needy. For better or for worse, money symbolises what really matters to us; thus giving our money is a symbolic but very real way of dying to ourselves. Generously giving some of it away is a challenge. It is not the amount we give that counts as much as the spirit of generosity with which we give it, as Jesus reminds us in His remarks about the widow who gave to the Temple collection all she had.¹⁰⁹

In the same way that Our Lord handed himself over to sinners and was sacrificed on the Cross for our salvation, we are called to give of ourselves in a variety of ways, including sharing our money with others. This is not to re-create Christ's sacrifice, but rather to participate in it.¹¹⁰

107 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; cf Galatians 2:10, Romans 15:25-29; 2 Corinthians 8-9

108 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 67

109 cf Luke 21:1-4

110 cf Michael Dubruiel, op cit, p 158

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Presentation of the Gifts

*The visible altar is the emblem of our faith itself in the inner temple of God.
Whatever offering we present to God at His altar, then . . . cannot be acceptable to God
unless it is sustained by the sincerity of our faith,
and, as it were, placed on that altar firmly and immovably.*

— Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount 10:27



Pious believers everywhere place gifts upon the altar so that the Godhead may accept them. These gifts belong to the Godhead and are withdrawn from human use through burning or pouring out.¹¹¹

The first part of the Mass was formerly called the Mass of the Catechumens. The catechumens, those desiring to join the Church, were allowed to hear the Scripture readings and homily during the Liturgy of the Word.

But then they were dismissed, and only those who had been baptised stayed for the next part, the Mass of the Faithful. Only the baptised made the Profession of Faith and joined in the Prayer of the Faithful. And only the baptised brought forward the elements to be consecrated: the bread and wine.

This presentation of gifts is a right and duty of the Catholic faithful. Thus it is inappropriate for anyone who does not have Catholic faith in the Eucharist and does not share Catholic faith in the Church that celebrates the Eucharist to present the bread and wine that will become the Eucharist.

This may seem harsh to some, until it is recalled that the early Church did not permit those without Catholic faith to attend the Liturgy of the Eucharist at all. In today's open society, we may not see a need for such a strict exclusion. Nevertheless, we cannot stand in a line of liturgical continuity with our forebears if we bring non-Catholics into the Eucharistic action itself.

Indeed, the Offertory procession is not simply a functional or decorative aspect of the Liturgy. It is the first of the four movements that make up the Eucharistic action as given us by Christ Himself: *The day before He suffered He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to His disciples ...*¹¹²

"He took bread" - this is the Offertory, when the people present the gifts for sacrifice and the priest takes them and places them on the altar.

During the Middle Ages, reverence for the Eucharist and a consciousness of personal unworthiness caused people to receive Communion much less frequently than today; often it was only the priest who received. Hence there was no need for quantities of bread and wine to be presented, and the Offertory procession came to be used only for special events like ordinations or the Chrism Mass. Its restoration by the liturgical renewal of the 1960s is a welcome return to the practice of the early Church.

Because our Catholic faith tells us that the bread and wine we present will become the Body and Blood of Christ, those who present the bread and wine must be Catholic believers. The gifts represent us, and those who bring them

to the altar represent the community of believers who are asking the priest to take them and change them into the Body and Blood of Christ.

73. The offerings are then brought forward. It is praiseworthy for the bread and wine to be presented by the faithful. They are then accepted at an appropriate place by the priest or the deacon and carried to the altar. Even though the faithful no longer bring from their own possessions the bread and wine intended for the liturgy as in the past, nevertheless the rite of carrying up the offerings still retains its force and its spiritual significance.

74. The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by the Offertory chant which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. Singing may always accompany the rite at the Offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts.

- 111 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 53-57
- 112 cf words of Consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Offering the Bread**

*We offer to Him the Host of our humility
and praise upon the altar of our heart.*

--The City of God 10:3



Bread is food. It is wholesome, nourishing food for which we never lose our appetite. Under the form of bread God becomes for us the Food of Life. "We break a bread," writes St Ignatius of Antioch, "that is the food of immortality." ... Bread gives us solid and substantial strength. ¹¹³

Following the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine with water to celebrate the Lord's Supper. ¹¹⁴

Without a doubt, Jesus would have used unleavened bread, matzah, at the Last Supper. This bread was unlike the usual bread baked by Jewish women; it contained no yeast. When Moses announced to the enslaved Israelites that "This is the night!" of their deliverance, he advised the women to bake bread for the journey, but to omit the yeast since there was no time to allow the dough to rise. *"Keep, then, this custom of the unleavened bread."* ¹¹⁵

St Paul indicates that this custom was kept by the Church, at least in the earliest days when Christianity still had strong ties to Judaism: *Get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves into a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast, then, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.* ¹¹⁶

But the Ebionite heresy (c 140) demanded that Christians keep all the precepts of the old Law of Moses. By this time, Christians had been excommunicated by the Jews, so leavened bread was used for the Eucharist in many places as a protest.

Charlemagne's advisor Alcuin indicated that at least by 798 unleavened bread was again the rule: *The bread which is consecrated into the Body of Christ ought to be most pure, without leaven or any other additive.* ¹¹⁷

Today, most Eastern Churches use leavened bread, while the Western Church and some Eastern Churches use unleavened bread. Both kinds are valid matter for consecration, but each ritual Church ordinarily follows its own tradition in order to have a licit celebration.

Not only the kind of bread, but the words used in presenting it to God have their origin in the Passover and Sabbath meal rituals. Jesus often prayed these Hebrew words: *Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu, melek ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.* "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth." His disciples would solemnly respond together: *Amein* - "Amen - this is true."

At Passover, Jesus would add the special blessing for Passover: *"Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who commands us to eat matzah."* Again the response came: *"Amen."*

The priest uses similar words in the Mass. In this way, the Church continues the tradition it has maintained for centuries: *In all that we offer, we bless the Creator of the universe through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit.*

118

As the bread is presented to God, all of us can present ourselves with our hopes and fears, our needs and our joys. Indeed, the offering that the priest makes on behalf of us all is an acknowledgement of God's Lordship, a recognition that all things are His. ¹¹⁹ *Blessed be God for ever.* ¹²⁰

75. The bread and wine are placed on the altar by the priest to the accompaniment of the prescribed formulas.

320-21. The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently baked and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened ... It is expedient that the Eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful.

113 Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* pp 65-68

114 GIRM no. 319

115 cf Exodus 12:8, 15, 17-20, 34

116 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

117 Alcuin, Letter 90, to the Brothers in Lyons

118 St Justin Martyr, loc cit

119 Romano Guardini, *Meditations before Mass*, pp 53-57

120 Roman Missal

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Mixing the Wine and Water**

*He was made a sharer in our mortality
that we might be sharers in His divinity.
We were made partakers in the One (Christ), unto life.
He became a partaker in us many, unto death.*

— On Psalm 118:19, 6



St Justin Martyr tells us: *Then ... and a cup of wine to which water has been added are brought to the one who is presiding over the assembly of the brethren.* ¹²¹

The use of wine was widespread in the Near East. Palestine was a wine-producing country, and the wines of Lebanon and Helbon (a city northeast of Damascus) were particularly good: *They will cultivate vines as renowned as the wine of Helbon.* ¹²²

The Bible credits Noah with the invention of wine, and also with the discovery of its intoxicating effects: *Noah, a tiller of the soil, was the first to plant the vine. He drank some of the wine, and while he was drunk ...* ¹²³

Because of its strength and its heavy texture, the ancients rarely drank their wine without first diluting it with water. This weakened wine is used as a figure of humanity weakened by sin: *Your silver has turned into dross, your wine is watered.* ¹²⁴

In the Western Churches, the mingling of the water and wine is seen to represent Christ's taking the people and their sins to Himself. The wine represents the strong and rich redemptive power of Christ, into which our frail humanity - represented by the small amount of water - is absorbed: *We see that the water stands for the people, whereas the wine stands for the Blood of Christ. When water is united with wine in the chalice, the people are made one with Christ; the believing people are joined and united with Him in Whom they believe.* ¹²⁵

The Churches of the East offer another interpretation, namely, that the wine and water in the one chalice represent the divine and human natures in Christ, present in one Person. The prayer said quietly by the priest reflects the traditions of both East and West: *By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, Who humbled Himself to share in our humanity.* ¹²⁶

Some evangelical Christian churches use grape juice instead of wine, due to their strict prohibition against the drinking of alcohol. Mormons use only water. But in the Catholic Church, true wine with

alcohol content but no additives (such as are found in port wine), mixed with a small amount of water is used in the celebration of the Eucharist, following the custom of Jesus and His apostles. This is the wine that will gladden our hearts. ¹²⁷ *Blessed be God for ever!*

142. After this, as the minister presents the cruets, the deacon or priest stands at the side of the altar and pours wine and a little water into the chalice, saying quietly: *Per huius aquae et vini mysterium* (By the mystery of this water and wine ...)

322. The wine for the Eucharistic celebration must be from the fruit of the grapevine (*cf. Lk 22: 1 B*), natural and unadulterated, that is, without admixture of extraneous substances.

121 St Justin Martyr, *op cit*, 65

122 Hosea 14:8; cf also Ezekiel 27:18

123 Genesis 9:20-21

124 Isaiah 1:22

125 St Cyprian, Letter 63

126 prayer at the mixing of the wine and water

127 cf Psalm 104:14

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: **Offering the Wine**

*When you begin to live a godly life in Christ,
you enter the wine-press.
So prepare yourselves for the pressing,
but don't be dried-up grapes —
otherwise nothing will come out of the wine-press!*

- On Psalm 55:4



The *Didache* ('The Teaching'), a 1st century Christian text that gives us prayers used in early celebrations of the Eucharist, includes these words: *We give You thanks, our Father, for the holy Vine of David Your servant, that You have revealed to us through Jesus, Your Child. Glory to You for ever!* ¹²⁸

When Christ the true Vine ¹²⁹ blessed a cup of wine at the Last Supper, a number of scriptural symbols and practical uses of wine came together in the Eucharist in a wonderful way.

In the production of wine, the first press was done by treading the grapes with the feet: *In those days I saw people in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath.* ¹³⁰ This was an occasion of great joy, accompanied by shouting and singing: *The Lord shouts aloud like those who tread the grape.* ¹³¹

This foot-stomping of grapes was a sign of joy; its absence signified the absence of God: *There is no longer wine in the presses, the treader of grapes treads no more, no more do shouts of joy ring out.* ¹³²

And the treading of grapes could mean the vengeful judgment of God: *I have trodden the winepress alone. Of the men of My people not one was with me. In My anger I trod them down, trampled them in My wrath. Their juice spattered My garments, and all My clothes are stained ... I crushed the people in My fury, trampled them in My anger, and made the juice of them run all over the ground.* ¹³³ These words inspired the famous hymn: *"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored."* ¹³⁴

The Scriptures exalt wine as a celebratory drink: *Their hearts will be cheered as though by wine.* ¹³⁵ It 'elevates moods': *Procure wine for the heart that is full of bitterness. Let him drink and forget his misfortune, and remember his misery no more.* ¹³⁶

Wine also has healing effects: the Good Samaritan treating the beaten man *went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them.* ¹³⁷ St Paul famously prescribed it for his disciple St Timothy: *You should give up drinking only water and have a little wine for the sake of your digestion and the frequent bouts of illness that you have.* ¹³⁸

And wine is a scriptural symbol of love and fraternal friendship: *I come into my garden, my sister, my promised bride ... I drink my wine ... Eat, friends, and drink; drink deep, my dearest friends.* ¹³⁹

Joy, sorrow, judgment, celebration, healing, weakness, love, friendship - all of this came together when, towards the end of the Passover meal, Jesus took the fourth cup of wine, the 'cup of blessing', blessed it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: *Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of My Blood, the Blood of the new and everlasting covenant ...* ¹⁴⁰

The purpose of wine is not only to quench thirst, but also to give pleasure and satisfaction and exhilaration. "My cup, how goodly it is, how plenteous!" Literally, how intoxicating, though not in the sense of drinking to excess. Wine possesses a sparkle, a perfume, a vigour that expands and clears the imagination. Under the form of wine Christ gives us His divine Blood. It is no plain and sober draught. It was bought at a great price ... "Blood of Christ, inebriate me!" prays St Ignatius Loyola, that knight of the burning heart. ¹⁴¹

142. (The priest) returns to the middle of the altar, takes the chalice with both hands, raises it a little, and says quietly: *Benedictus es, Domine* (Blessed are you, Lord ...). Then he places the chalice on the corporal and covers it with a pall, as appropriate. If however, there is no Offertory chant and the organ is not played, in the presentation of the bread and wine the priest may say the formulas of blessing aloud, to which the people make the acclamation: *Benedictus Deus in saecula* (Blessed be God for ever).

128 Didache

129 cf John 15:1-6

130 Nehemiah 13:15

131 Jeremiah 25:30

132 Jeremiah 38:33

133 Isaiah 63:3,6

134 Julia Ward Howe, The Battle Hymn of the Republic

135 Zechariah 10:7

136 Proverbs 31:6-7

137 Luke 10:34

138 1 Timothy 5:23

139 Song of Songs 5:1

140 cf words of Consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer

141 Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, pp 65-68

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: A Prayer of Humility

*Would you like to be great?
Start by being humble.
The higher the building,
the deeper must be its foundation.*

- Sermon 70:1-2



143. After placing the chalice upon the altar, the priest bows profoundly and says quietly: *In spiritu humilitatis* (In a spirit of humility ...)

This brief prayer finds its inspiration in the words of Azariah, one of the three young men in the fiery furnace. He longs for the sacrifices that had been offered in the Temple before the Exile of the Jews in Babylon. But he has come to realise that it is the spiritual sacrifice that pleases God best: *With contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; as though it were holocausts of rams and bullocks, or thousands of fat lambs, so let our sacrifice be in your presence today as we follow You unreservedly, for those who trust in You cannot be put to shame.* ¹⁴²

The prayer first appeared in various prayer books of the Middle Ages, and gradually became part of the Preparation of the Gifts. When Pope St Pius V codified the Roman Missal in 1570, in accordance with the decrees of the Council of Trent, this prayer was made obligatory.

Although its text is not from the earliest centuries of Christianity, the prayer's expression of the awareness of our own unworthiness is common to many ancient liturgies. Here is an example: *Cast Your eyes on us, Lord; we lay our weaknesses before You. Grant pardon and mercy to us all. Have pity on Your people, show them Your goodness, make them generous, chaste and pure.* ¹⁴³

Humility is necessary not only for the priest. It is a virtue needed by anyone who desires to grow in a relationship with the Creator. It is a prerequisite to sainthood, as St John Chrysostom reminds us: *Humility comes first ... without it, it is impossible to be saved. Even if one fasts, prays and gives alms, if he does so with a proud spirit, all of these are trifling things and are done foolishly, since the virtue of humility is absent.* ¹⁴⁴

St Augustine agrees: *God sees how faltering our steps are, and so He has made a way for us. This way is first of all, humility; second, humility; third, humility; and however often you should ask me the way, I would say the same ... If humility does not precede and accompany and follow every good work we do, if it is not set before us to look upon, and beside us to lean upon, and behind us to fence us in, pride will take from our hand any good deed we do.* ¹⁴⁵

Pope Blessed John XXIII, wrote these words in his last will and testament: *The sense of my littleness and unworthiness has always kept me good company, making me humble and tranquil, and permitting me the joy of putting my best efforts into a continual exercise of obedience and love for souls and for the interests of the Kingdom of Jesus, my Lord and my all. To Him be all the glory: for me and for my own merits, only His mercy.* ¹⁴⁶

We come to Holy Mass to imitate Jesus in His self-offering to His Father. Although He was the Son of God, He humbled Himself to become a man and to be obedient even unto death. ¹⁴⁷ In this act of humiliation He was exalted through His Resurrection. ¹⁴⁸

The priest, as *alter Christus*, another Christ, must always be aware of his obligation to unite himself to Jesus, the humble Servant. As the priest bows before the altar to pray the prayer of humility, all who worship God 'in spirit and in truth, ¹⁴⁹ do well to ask for the grace to grow in humility, the foundation of all other virtues.

- 142 Daniel 3:39-40
- 143 Euchology, The Sunday Synaxis, 1
- 144 St John Chrysostom, Homily 33 on St John
- 145 St Augustine, Letter 145
- 146 Pope Bl John XXIII. Journal of a Soul, written 1954, 1957
- 147 cf Philippians 2:8
- 148 cf Acts 2:33-36
- 149 John 4:23

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: Incensation (A sign of our worship)

*The pure prayer that ascends from a faithful heart
will be like incense rising from a hallowed altar.
No fragrance can be more pleasing to God
than that of His own Son.
May all His faithful people exude the same sweet fragrance.*

-On Psalm 140:6



May my prayer arise before You like incense, the lifting of my hands like the evening oblation. ¹⁵⁰

At the end of each day of worship in the Temple of Jerusalem, after the many sacrifices of animals, birds and foodstuffs had been burnt on the great altar that stood before the Holy of Holies, the priests offered incense on a special golden altar. This last sacrifice of the day, offered in the presence of thousands of worshipping Jews, produced a fragrant cloud that reminded them of God's presence centuries earlier during their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land: *The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day.* ¹⁵¹

Incense is a powerful symbol. As it rises, the smoke of the incense enhances the aspiration expressed by the gaze of those who are at prayer. ¹⁵² *We ourselves are gifts offered to God; the ascending incense is an image of our own self-surrender ... When the congregation stands for the incensation, it is a sign that we are raising ourselves up, because our hearts are directed upward, like the incense rising to heaven.* ¹⁵³

The first Christians did not use incense. For the followers of Jesus who lived in Jerusalem, the offering of incense was part of Temple worship, and was not connected with the Breaking of the Bread celebrated in homes. For Christians in other places, incense was connected with the worship of pagan deities. In fact, the burning of incense has been used by nearly every world religion as a way of designating something or someone as being sacred.

When Christianity was legalised by Constantine in 313, the Church was given the right to adopt the civil honours given to officials of the state. One of these was the burning of incense in a brazier which was carried before a senator or magistrate as he entered a basilica, originally a public hall. This became the custom at the entrance of bishops into basilicas that had been converted into churches. It was also used during the Gospel Procession. By the 7th century, Rome had adopted the Eastern custom of incensing the gifts on the altar. And by the 14th century, the rite of incensation was fully developed with a blessing of the incense, incensation of the gifts and altar with accompanying prayers and complex gestures, and finally the incensation of the clergy and people.

Priest and people are called to be holy: *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart.* ¹⁵⁴ In the liturgy God is to be honoured by the body of the faithful, and the faithful are to derive sanctification from this act of worship. ¹⁵⁵

During the incensation of the gifts, priest and people, our interior prayer can be similar to these words from the early Church: *Let your sacrifice be spotless and pleasing to God, Who has said of His ecumenical Church: In every place I am offered incense and a pure offering. For I am a great King, says the Lord Almighty, and My Name is wonderful among the nations.*¹⁵⁶

75. The priest may incense the gifts placed upon the altar and then incense the cross and the altar itself, so as to signify the Church's offering and prayer rising like incense in the sight of God. Next, the priest, because of his sacred ministry, and the people, by reason of their baptismal dignity, may be incensed by the deacon or another minister.

150 Psalm 141:2

151 Exodus 13:21

152 cf Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*

153 Bernhard Kleinheyer, *op cit*, 167

154 1 Peter 2:9, cf Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 43:20-21, Malachi 3:17

155 Romano Guardini, *op cit*, 141

156 The Apostolic Constitutions VII, 30, 1-2

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Lavabo (Clean inside and out)

*The Psalmist says, "I will wash my hands among the innocent,
and I will go about Your altar, O Lord."
He means that we must purify all our actions among God's people,
and when we come to the altar,
we must wash our hands with which we shall embrace His glorious gifts.*

-- On Psalm 26:6



76. The priest then washes his hands at the side of the altar; a rite that is an expression of his desire for interior purification.
145. ... The priest washes his hands standing at the side of the altar and, as the minister pours the water, says quietly: *Lava me, Domine* (Lord, wash away my iniquity ...).

Every part of the body is an expressive instrument of the soul. The soul does not inhabit the body as a person inhabits a house. It lives and works in each member, each fibre, and reveals itself in the body's every line, contour and movement. But the soul's chief instruments and clearest mirrors are the face and hands. ¹⁵⁷

The washing of the hands of the priest is a simple rite, so simple that some priests mistakenly omit it, thinking that it is unnecessary.

It is a silent rite, pertaining to the priest alone and therefore not proclaimed aloud, yet it is performed in full view of the assembly so that all can observe it.

It is an ancient rite, its roots being in pre-Christian religions and Old Testament Judaism, but it speaks to the heart of modern humanity.

The washing of hands is also known as the *Lavabo* from the first Latin word of the sixth verse of Psalm 26, which accompanies this rite in the Missal of Bl. John XXIII: *I will wash my hands among the innocent*. The Missal of Paul VI indicates a different text, Psalm 51:2, cited above.

Water purification was an important feature of Judaism. The Blessed Virgin Mary, conceived without sin, nevertheless submitted to a rite of purification before presenting the Child Jesus in the Temple. Removing her garments, she submerged herself in one of the women's *mikveh* or baths outside the Temple, then put on a special robe, her 'Temple garment', before joining St Joseph and entering the Temple courtyard.

Jesus, together with Mary and Joseph, would have washed his face, hands and feet each morning and evening before reciting His prayers. Likewise, like all practising Jews, they would have washed before saying grace and eating their meals.

Our Lord criticised the Pharisees for being more concerned about washing their cups and plates than about having pure hearts. ¹⁵⁸

In his account of the Last Supper, St John makes a point of Jesus taking upon Himself the service of washing the feet of His disciples. Certainly this washing served a practical purpose, since people wore open sandals and walked in dusty roads. However, this washing was part of the spiritual preparation for the Passover, a meal that was accompanied by many prayers. Thus St Peter,

reprimanded by Our Lord for his false pride in refusing to have his feet washed by his Master, not only acquiesces but says that Jesus can perform all three ritual washings: *"Then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well."* ¹⁵⁹

The priest who has a sense of his own unworthiness before the Lord, and a 'desire for interior purification', performs it devoutly as a witness to his people. Like St Peter, the priests of the Lord Jesus should humble themselves in preparation for the sublime sacrificial act they are about to perform, desiring not only to wash their hands as the Church prescribes, but 'hands and feet as well' - in other words, to be entirely cleansed from sin.

157 Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* pp 15-18

158 cf Matthew 23:25-26

159 John 13:9

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Invitation to the Eucharist (Orate, Fratres)

*The Lord Himself commands the guests
to be invited to His great Supper. . .
For the Supper of the Lord is the unity of the Body of Christ,
not only in the Sacrament of the Altar,
but also in the bond of peace.*

- Against the Donatists 6:22, 24



146. Upon returning to the middle of the altar, the priest, facing the people and extending and then joining his hands, invites the people to pray, saying: *Orate, fratres* (Pray, brethren). The people rise and make their response: *Suscipiat Dominus* (May the Lord accept . . .).

In the liturgy of the ancient Roman Rite, the bishop said a prayer over the bread and wine once they were placed on the altar, and then he immediately began the Eucharistic Prayer. But around the 700s, in the Frankish countries (modern France, Germany and surrounds) we find an invitation to pray. Sometimes this was addressed quietly to the ministering clergy, but sometimes it was spoken aloud to the entire assembly. At first, silence was the expected response. Then a variety of spoken responses were devised, until about the 11th century when the response we now use was generally accepted.

The priest invites us to pray, but specifically that the sacrifice being offered to the Father will be acceptable. This can serve to remind us that there are times when people offer an *unacceptable* sacrifice to God. Recall Cain's offering, for which God "had no regard." ¹⁶⁰ At times, God rejected the sacrifice of the priests in the Temple of Jerusalem: "*I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.*" ¹⁶¹ And so St Paul appeals to Christians to "*present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, as your spiritual worship.*" ¹⁶²

The early Church understood the importance of making a worthy and acceptable offering. In one of her early liturgies, she prayed thus: *Make this Church to be living and pure, grant her to possess divine powers, to have at her service the pure angels, so that she may be able to celebrate You purely.* ¹⁶³

The people make a detailed response to the priest's invitation to pray, asking that (1) the Lord accept the sacrifice (2) which is being offered through the anointed hands of the priest (3) for the praise and glory of God's Name, (4) for our own good (5) as well as for the good of the entire holy Church of God.

As the priest invites us to join him in the sacrificial act, the entire assembly stands to signify its assent to this act of worship, and its readiness to give thanks and praise to God. In this desire to offer an acceptable sacrifice, the prophecy of Malachi finds its fulfillment: *For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My Name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered in My Name, and a pure offering.* ¹⁶⁴

160 cf Genesis 4:5

161 Malachi 1:10

162 Romans 12:1

163 Euchology, The Sunday Synaxis, 10

164 Malachi 1:11

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: The Prayer over the Gifts



The Prayer over the Gifts evolved from a spoken prayer to being prayed very quietly, probably due to Byzantine influence and the desire to introduce more reverence into what was becoming a very wordy liturgy. For centuries, then, this Prayer over the Gifts was called the 'Secret', meaning it was prayed quietly rather than proclaimed aloud.

Now this prayer has been given back its original name and character. The text of the Prayer over the Gifts often echoes the words of the preceding invitation to prayer: *Pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father*. It is often related to the liturgical celebration of the day or season, and asks God to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

All of these thoughts, all of our anticipation of the Eucharist, are gathered together in both our response to the priest's invitation to pray, and in the Prayer over the Gifts which he offers on behalf of us all. With our *Amen*, we are ready to enter into the Eucharistic Prayer. We pray that we, along with the

elements of the sacrifice, will be changed and transformed to become the Mystical Body of Christ, as St Paul reminds us we truly are called to be: *Now you are Christ's Body, and individually parts of it.* ¹⁶⁵ With St Therese of the Child Jesus, we say: *Our only duty is to become united to God.* ¹⁶⁶

*The Prophet Malachi foresaw the Church which we now see spread worldwide by and through Christ, saying,
'From the rising of the sun to its going down,
My name is great among the nations;
And in every place sacrifice shall be made,
And a pure oblation shall be offered unto My Name;
For My Name shall be great among the nations,
Says the Lord.'* Mal 1:10-11

We can already see this sacrifice offered to God in every place, from the rising of the sun to its going down, through Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek."

– *The City of God* 18:35

146. Then the priest, with hands extended, says the Prayer over the Offerings ...

77. The people, uniting themselves to this entreaty, make the prayer their own with the acclamation: *Amen* ... Once the offerings have been placed on the altar and the accompanying rites completed, the invitation to pray with the priest and the Prayer over the Offerings conclude the Preparation of the Gifts and prepare for the Eucharistic Prayer.

165 1 Corinthians 12:27

166 Sr Geneviève of the Holy Face (Celine Martin), *My Sister Saint Thérèse*, p 99

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Eucharistic Prayer (Sursum corda) - We raise our hearts on high

*Lift up your heart
so that it will not rot on earth.
This is the advice given by Him
Who wishes not to destroy, but to save.*

— Sermon 60:7



78. Now the centre and summit of the entire celebration begins, namely, the Eucharistic Prayer; that is, the prayer of thanksgiving and sanctification. The priest invites the people to lift up their hearts to the Lord in prayer and thanksgiving.

Let the deacons present the offering to (the bishop). When he lays his hands on it, with the whole college of priests, let him say the words of thanksgiving: The Lord be with you. And with your spirit. Let us lift up our hearts. They are turned to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is worthy and just. ¹⁶⁷

The Eucharistic Prayer begins with a dialogue known as the *Sursum corda* (Latin for 'Lift up your hearts.') This expression is hard to translate; it actually means something closer to 'Hearts on high!'

Likewise, the people's response, *Habemus ad Dominum*, 'We lift them up to the Lord,' is more accurately rendered 'We have them before the Lord.' For obvious reasons, our English translation is a bit different, while helping us understand the sense of the Latin.

St Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) was a bishop and teacher of the Faith who delivered a series of sermons, known as The Catechetical Lectures, to catechumens and the general Christian population of his city, for which he will forever be famous. Here is what he says about the *Sursum corda*:

The priest cries out, 'Lift up your hearts!' For in this most solemn hour it is necessary for us to have our hearts raised up with God, and not fixed below on the earth and earthly things. It is as if the priest is instructing us to dismiss all physical cares and domestic anxieties, and to have our hearts in heaven with the benevolent God. Then you answer, 'We lift them up to the Lord.' In other words, you give assent to what the priest has said by the acknowledgement that you make. Let no one come here, then, who could say, 'We lift them up to the Lord,' whilst being preoccupied with physical cares. ¹⁶⁸

In other words, when we enter the moment of the Eucharist, we transcend our earthly lives, and 'earth is joined to heaven'. Human time ceases, and we join the heavenly court in the eternal moment of thanks to God. For that is what the Greek word *eucharistia* means: giving thanks.

St Cyril continues: *Then the priest says, 'Let us give thanks to the Lord.' Certainly we ought to give thanks to God for having invited us, unworthy as we are, to so great a gift. We ought to give thanks to God for reconciling us to Himself when we were His enemies. We ought to give thanks to God for having made us His adopted children by the Spirit.*

Then you say, 'It is right and just.' For in giving thanks, we do a worthy thing, something that is justice itself. But what God did in accounting us worthy of such benefits was not justice, but much more than just. ¹⁶⁹

This dialogue is present in all traditional Eucharistic Prayers of all rites, attesting to its antiquity and importance. *Lift up your heart* is an expression

found in Scripture: *Let us stretch out our hearts and hands to God in heaven.* ¹⁷⁰
And that is our purpose at Mass: to reach out to God, to touch heaven, to move beyond earthly cares and communicate with our Father Who loves us, knows our needs, and wants to 'lift all things to Himself.'

This is God's plan for us: that we should yearn for eternal life at every Eucharist, at every celebration of this 'foretaste of future glory'. ¹⁷¹

Indeed, let us lift up our hearts and turn them toward God, that His face may shine upon us as we come into His presence.

167 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 36: Anaphora

168 St Cyril of Jerusalem, The Catechetical Lectures, no. 848d

169 ibid, no. 848e

170 Lamentations 3:41

171 St Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers of Corpus Christi

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Preface (A reason to pray)

*My God,
let me remember You with thanksgiving
and proclaim Your mercies to me.*

• Confessions B1



79 a. In the Preface, the priest, in the name of the entire holy people, glorifies God the Father and gives thanks for the whole work of salvation or for some special aspect of it that corresponds to the day, festivity, or season.

Let the bishop continue thus: We give You thanks, O God, through Your beloved Child, Jesus Christ, Whom You have sent to us in the last times as Saviour, Redeemer and Messenger of Your will. He is Your inseparable Word through Whom You have created all things and in Whom You are well pleased. You sent Him from heaven into the womb of a Virgin. He was conceived and became incarnate, He manifested Himself as Your Son, born of the Spirit and the Virgin. He accomplished Your will and, to acquire a holy people for You, He stretched out His hands while He suffered to deliver from suffering those who believe in You ... ¹⁷²

The Eucharistic Prayer is not primarily a prayer of petition or of contrition, or even of praise. All of those motives of prayer enter into it; but the main thrust of the Eucharistic Prayer is thanksgiving: *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

Those words come to us from the Jewish invitation to prayer at the blessing of the cup of wine, both at Passover and at the weekly Sabbath meal. In fact, the whole concept of offering '*a sacrifice of thanksgiving*' is directly borrowed from the Jewish concept of *berekah*.¹⁷³ This was a long prayer enumerating God's many blessings upon Israel, accompanied by a sacrificial offering: an animal, bird or cereal sacrifice, or bread and wine at a ritual meal.

'Preface' comes from a Latin word which means 'a proclamation in the presence' of God and His people. Every ancient Eucharistic prayer (or *anaphora*, Greek for 'offering') begins with a Preface - a reason for praising God's work of creation and redemption. In the Eastern Churches, the Preface is usually quite long and comprehensive, and is fixed rather than changeable.

The Roman rite, however, has always had a variety of Prefaces. The Roman Missal now has over eighty individual Prefaces for feast days, liturgical seasons, votive Masses and special occasions. Each one is a relatively concise statement of praise that is addressed to God the Father through Christ His Son.

Eucharistic Prayers I (the Roman Canon) and III do not have proper Prefaces of their own. Prayer II has a special Preface, but others may be substituted for it. Prayer IV, however, is based on the Eastern model and has a longer Preface, a beautiful poem of praise and thanks, which must always be used with it since the thematic development begun in it continues beyond the *Sanctus* (Holy).

Ideally, the Preface is sung, which then leads naturally into the singing of the people's acclamation *Holy, holy, holy*. But even if it is recited, the structure of the Preface is such that it builds to a dramatic climax: *And so, with angels and archangels and the whole company of saints, we sing the unending hymn of Your praise*. If it is declaimed properly, the people will be led into their response in a way that truly underscores their thanks to God for all He has given us in Christ.

Yes, it is right to give Him thanks and praise.

172 St Hippolytus, Apostolic Tradition, 6: Anaphora

173 cf Leviticus 7:12-13; Psalm 107:22, 116:17; Amos 4:5

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Sanctus (Holy, holy, holy)

*Love sings now;
in heaven, too, it is love that will sing.
But now it is a yearning love that sings;
then, it will be an enjoying love.*

-- Sermon 254:6



79 b. The whole congregation, joining with the heavenly powers, sings the Sanctus. This acclamation, which is part of the Eucharistic Prayer itself, is sung or said by all the people with the priest.

*You are attended by thousands upon thousands and myriads upon myriads of Angels and Archangels, of Thrones and Dominations, of Principalities and Powers. Beside You stand the two august Seraphim with six wings: two to cover their face, two to cover their feet, two with which to fly. They sing Your holiness. With theirs, accept also our acclamation of Your holiness: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are filled with Your glory. The heaven is filled, the earth is filled with Your wonderful glory!*¹⁷⁴

The Prophet Isaiah (born c 765 B.C.) was about twenty-five when he received his prophetic calling whilst in the Temple of Jerusalem: *In the year of King Uzziah's death (740 B.C.), I saw the Lord God seated on a high throne. The train of His robe filled the sanctuary. Above Him stood seraphs, each one with six wings: two to cover its face, two to cover its feet and two for flying. And they cried out one to another in this way: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with His glory."*¹⁷⁵

The Hebrew word for 'holy', *kadosh*, means 'separate'. The person who wants to be holy must be separate from others, different from those who persist in their sin. God Himself is separate from His creatures by virtue of His transcendent majesty and glory.

He is not human but divine, the Most High, the All-Holy.

Ancient Hebrew had no way to express the degrees of an adjective (e.g., holy, holier, holiest) other than to repeat the word. So we imitate the Hebrew style in saying that God is 'holy, holy, holy'.

The first Christians, who were themselves Jews, joined in the daily morning synagogue chant, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory!"* But as an acclamation to conclude the Preface, the *Sanctus* was first used in Alexandria, Egypt some time before 230 A.D., spreading from there to all of Christendom.

The Preface leads to the *Sanctus*, with its evocation of "angels and archangels and all the hosts of Heaven'. While the priest speaks *about* God in the Preface, the whole assembly takes its cue and sings directly to God in an exultant acclamation of praise.

God Himself comes to us in the divine Person of Jesus Christ, made present in the Eucharist. We announce this imminent Real Presence with another verse from Scripture: *Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord!"*¹⁷⁶ Jesus Himself prophesied: *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! ... Yes, I promise you, you shall not see Me till the time comes when you say: 'Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord! '"*¹⁷⁷

Both the *Sanctus* and the *Benedictus* ('Blessed is He') conclude with *Hosanna in the highest!* 'Hosanna' is a Hebrew invocation that means 'Save, we ask you!'

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, many Jews were expecting Him to take advantage of the multitude gathered for Passover to lead an uprising against the Romans. Their acclamation, "*Hosanna in the highest!*" was a cry for help: "We ask You, save us - really!" (i.e., 'in the highest').

Acclaiming God as All-Holy reflects His call to us: "*Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.*" ¹⁷⁸ With Christians of every generation in history, we eagerly await the coming of the Lord Jesus into our midst and cry out, "*Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!*"

174 Euchology, Prayer of the Anaphora, 13

175 Isaiah 6:1-5

176 Psalm 118:26

177 Luke 13:34-35

178 Leviticus 19:2

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: Praise of the Father

You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Your power, and infinite is Your wisdom. We want to praise You — we who are just a tiny part of Your creation! You awaken us to find joy in Your praise, for You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless, until it rests in You.

— Confessions 1:1



(The presider) takes them (the bread and cup of wine) , gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe through the Name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then makes a long eucharist (thanksgiving) for having been judged worthy of these good things. ¹⁷⁹

As with so many other aspects of Catholic liturgy, the Eucharistic Prayer is closely connected with traditions of Judaism. The *berakah*, the table prayers and blessings required at every Jewish meal, was adapted by early Jewish Christians for use at the Eucharist.

During the Last Supper, Jesus "*took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying ...* "

It is important to understand that the Institution Narrative, which is the heart of the Eucharistic Prayer, is not a 'script' to be acted out at that moment. The priest does not break the Host when the text says '*broke it*', just as he does not immediately begin distributing Holy Communion when the text says '*and gave it to His disciples*'.

Those four verbs - took, blessed, broke, gave - are a compressed summary of the entire Eucharistic action. They describe the four principal actions of the sacrificial act of the Mass:

He took the bread - the Preparation of the Gifts, where the elements for the sacrifice are brought to the priest, who takes them and places them on the altar;

He blessed it - the Eucharistic Prayer, modeled after the Jewish prayer of blessing, during which the priest consecrates the gifts;

He broke it - the Breaking of the Bread, where the priest prepares the consecrated Body and Blood of the Lord for sharing with the faithful;

He gave it - Holy Communion, where the priest administers the Eucharistic gifts to the participants in the sacrifice.

The Eucharistic Prayer, including the Consecration with its Institution Narrative, is not directed toward the people at all. Rather, the priest leads the people in directing the prayer to God the Father.

Dialogue between priest and people is central to the action during the Liturgy of the Word. And in the course of the Liturgy of the Eucharist, such as the end of the Preparation of the Gifts ("*Pray, my brothers and sisters* ") and at the start of the Eucharistic Prayer ("*The Lord be with you ... Lift up your hearts Let us give thanks ...* ") the priest directly addresses the people.

But other prayers are directed to the Father: *"Blessed are You, Lord, God of all creation ... Lord, we ask You to receive us ... Lord, wash away my iniquity ... Father, all-powerful and ever-living God ... Holy, holy, holy Lord ... Lord, You are holy indeed ... All glory and honour is Yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever."*

The Eucharistic Prayer in particular is not directed toward the people, but to God the Father. The words and actions of this moment of the Mass are not spoken to the people but, with eyes uplifted, are addressed to God our heavenly Father.

Thus the Church reminds us: *In these prayers the priest, while he performs the commemoration, turns toward God, even in the name of the whole people, renders Him thanks and offers the living and holy Sacrifice, redemption namely, the Church's offering and the Victim by whose immolation God willed to be appeased; and he prays that the Body and Blood of Christ may be a sacrifice acceptable to the Father and salvific for the whole world.*¹⁸⁰

78. The priest unites the congregation with himself in the Prayer that he addresses in the name of the entire community to God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the meaning of the Prayer is that the entire congregation of the faithful should join itself with Christ in confessing the great deeds of God and in the offering of sacrifice. The Eucharistic Prayer demands that all listen to it with reverence and in silence.

179 Justin 24-5

180 GIRM, Preamble, no 2

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Epiklesis (Calling down the Spirit)

*Understand now what Your Apostle Paul says:
"The love of God has been poured into our hearts
by the Holy Spirit."*

- Confessions 7:8



79 c. In the Epiklesis, by means of particular invocations, the Church implores the power of the Holy Spirit that the gifts offered by human hands be consecrated, that is, become Christ's Body and Blood, and that the spotless Victim to be received in Communion be for the salvation of those who will partake of it.

The Greek word *epiklesis* means 'to invoke, to call down upon.' For ancient pagans and Christians alike, it signified the invoking of a name. Thus the words of Baptism are an epiklesis, as are other sacramental formulae where the Persons of the Trinity are invoked over a person.

In all forms of the Eucharistic Prayer, the Epiklesis is evident because of the priest's gesture. From the *orans* or praying position with his hands outstretched, he lowers his hands and holds them, palms down, over the bread and wine as he makes the invocation: Then he makes a Sign of the Cross over the gifts with his right hand.

The liturgies of the early Church testify to the importance of the Holy Spirit's action in the Eucharist: *And so we beg You to send Your Holy Spirit upon the offering of Your Holy Church, to gather and unite all those who receive it. May they be filled with the Holy Spirit Who strengthens their faith in the truth. So may we be able to praise and glorify You through Your Child Jesus Christ.* ¹⁸¹ And again: *Send down upon this sacrifice Your Holy Spirit, "witness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus"* ¹⁸² *that He may make this bread the Body of Your Christ, and this cup the Blood of Your Christ.* ¹⁸³

In the liturgical theology of the Eastern Churches, the Epiklesis is the moment when the bread and wine become the Lord's Body and Blood, and it comes as a conclusion to the Institution Narrative (the words describing what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper). In the tradition of the West, the Institution Narrative itself is the focal moment of consecration. But both East and West agree that both Epiklesis and Institution Narrative are essential parts of the Eucharistic Prayer.

How did this difference of emphasis arise? Theologians in the West, beginning with St Ambrose (340-397) stressed the importance of the words of Institution, and other theologians followed suit. But the Greeks reacted to certain heretical tendencies that attacked the divinity of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity, and placed emphasis on the distinct action of the Spirit in sanctifying both the gifts and the people.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit is not simply an expression of the love between the Father and the Son, but is a distinct and divine Person of the Blessed Trinity.

For centuries, the difference between the Eastern and Western approach to the Epiklesis caused no great difficulties. In the Middle Ages, the tendency of some Western theologians to try to pinpoint the actual 'moment' of the Consecration became a point of controversy, not only between East and West, but within the Western Church itself.

Today it is commonly agreed that the entire Eucharistic Prayer is consecratory, and that the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit is essential. The Eucharistic Prayer is a unified whole - one Prayer, and not a series of individual prayers.

There are two points in the Eucharistic Prayer when the Holy Spirit is invoked. The first is before the Consecration, when the focus is on the gifts to be consecrated: But there is also a second aspect of the Epiklesis that invokes the Spirit again after the Consecration. This invocation asks that all who partake of the Eucharist be made one in Christ.

This is the true richness of the Eucharistic mystery: through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are given the grace-filled opportunity to be set apart as God's holy People, to be transformed, to be Christ's living presence in the world.

181 St Hippolytus, loc cit

182 cf 1 Peter 5:1

183 The Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 12, 29

The Eucharistic Prayer: **The Consecration of the Host (Bread becomes Christ's Body)**

*"Lord, You bring forth bread from the earth."
What bread? Christ.
He is the Bread Who came down from heaven,
that He might be brought forth out of the earth,
from the Apostles and their successors
who still walk upon the earth.*

- On Psalm 104:19



79 d. By means of words and actions of Christ, the Sacrifice is carried out which Christ himself instituted at the Last Supper, when he offered his Body and Blood under the species of bread and wine, gave them to his Apostles to eat and drink, and left them the command to perpetuate this same mystery.

That the Mass is a sacrificial action is revealed, among other ways, in a small gesture. When the priest pronounces the Institution Narrative, at the words *"He took the bread and gave You thanks,"* he takes the bread and lifts it a little above the altar. This is an ancient gesture, a 'little elevation' which goes back to the Paschal meal rituals which are still used by Jews today. The head of the household lifts the bread and cup a little while speaking the words of blessing. It seems well established that this gesture is one of offering, since the Paschal supper was both a ritual feast and a sacrificial meal.¹⁸⁴

And in the Mass, the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present and shared. Recall how, after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes for the multitude, He preached a beautiful discourse about the Bread of life: *"My Flesh is true food, and My Blood is true drink. Whoever eats My Flesh and drinks My Blood remains in Me and I in Him ... whoever eats this Bread will live for ever."*¹⁸⁵ The people abandoned Jesus, saying that His teaching was too hard to accept. Jesus did not try to modify His words; He remained firm, and even gave His disciples the opportunity to leave as well.¹⁸⁶

This fact confirms that Jesus meant what He said: He gives us His own true Body and Blood under forms of bread and wine. *"This is My Body, Which will be given up for you." What has happened? For almost 2000 years people have prayed and probed and fought over the meaning of these words. They have become the sign of a community that is holier, more intimate than any other, but also occasion for the most profound schisms. Hence, when we ask what they mean, let us first be clear as to how they should be taken. There is only one answer: literally. The words mean precisely what they say. Any attempt to understand them "spiritually" is disobedience and leads to disbelief. It is not our task to decide what they should mean in order to express "pure Christianity," but to accept them reverently as they stand, and to learn from them what Christian purity is.*

*When Jesus spoke and acted as He did, He knew that all He said and did was of divine importance. He wished to be understood, and spoke accordingly. The disciples were no symbolists, neither were they 19th or 20th century conceptualists, but simple fishermen much more inclined to take Jesus' words literally than spiritually. Even generally speaking, the man of antiquity was accustomed to perceiving and thinking through the evidence of his senses rather than abstractly. As to Christ's gestures, every detail of these men's lives was saturated with cult, and they were accustomed to reading truth from sign and symbol. Aware of all this, the Lord yet spoke and acted as He did.*¹⁸⁷

These words clearly express Catholic faith in the doctrine of transubstantiation, i.e. *that the whole substance of bread is changed into the substance of the Body of Christ ... This change is brought about in the Eucharistic Prayer through the efficacy of the word of Christ and by the action of the Holy Spirit. However, the outward characteristics of bread and wine, that is, the 'Eucharistic species', remain unaltered.*¹⁸⁸

Thus it is with true faith that Catholics adore Christ present in the Eucharist. With St Thomas the Apostle, who once doubted but then believed, we look at the sacred Host and say, *"My Lord and my God!"*¹⁸⁹

184 cf Romano Guardini, Sacred Symbols 134

185 John 6:55-56, 58

186 cf John 6:60-68

187 Romano Guardini, The Lord, pp 368-373

188 Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 283

189 John 20:28

The Eucharistic Prayer: The Consecration of the Chalice (Wine becomes Christ's Blood)



*"And wine to gladden our hearts."
If the excellent Cup of the Lord runs over and fills you,
it shall be seen in your works,
it shall be seen in your holy love of righteousness,
it shall be seen, lastly, in the conversion of your mind
from earthly things to those that are heavenly.*

Jesus takes the chalice and blesses it; and what He hands them is no longer only the sacred drink offering of the Pasch, but the mystery of the New Covenant just established. And all that takes place is not only the celebration of one high, fleeting hour; it is a sacred rite institutional for all time and constantly to be renewed until God's kingdom comes, and the Lord Himself celebrates it again with His own in the unveiled glory of the new creation. ¹⁹⁰

When the Jewish people celebrate Passover, they are not simply remembering a historical event. Through the retelling of the story of their deliverance, and the use of ritual foods and actions that illustrate that wondrous story, the past becomes present. The Passover is now: *"This is the night when our ancestors were delivered from bondage"* ¹⁹¹

Because we live in human time, *chronos* as the Greeks call it, we forget that God exists beyond time. He is not bound by clocks and calendars; He lives in *kairos*, the 'eternal now'. For God there is no past or future, only the present moment. Thus, His knowledge of the future is not some kind of foretelling; God knows the future simply because the future is present to Him now.

Similarly, past events are not over and done for God; they go on, because the past is also present to Him. Thus the saving Death and Resurrection of Christ are an ongoing event, ever present to God - and ever present to His Church. Again, *it is a sacred rite institutional for all time and constantly to be renewed until God's kingdom comes, and the Lord Himself celebrates it again with His own ...* ¹⁹²

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The Victim is one and the same: the Same (Christ) now offers through the ministry of priests, Who then offered Himself on the Cross; only the manner of offering is different." ¹⁹³ No, Jesus is not dying again and again in every Mass; He died once for all. ¹⁹⁴ But His death is an act of self-offering that transcends space and time. It happened once in history, ¹⁹⁵ but it is spiritually renewed in every re-presentation because the Risen Christ lives a life that is beyond human history.

"In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ Who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner." ¹⁹⁶ No, animals are not slain and blood is not sprinkled upon a people waiting to be forgiven. We have been redeemed by the saving Blood of Christ, and that grace is available to all. But it is up to each individual to claim that redemption by accepting a share in the Cross, dying to sin and living the risen life of the Saviour.

"This ... shall be a memorial feast for you, which all your generations shall celebrate with pilgrimage to the Lord, as a perpetual institution." ¹⁹⁷ In the Mass, the memorial feast of our liberation from slavery to sin and death is truly a perpetual institution. Christ has shed His precious Blood for the forgiveness of our sins: come, let us adore Him!

3. The wondrous mystery of the Lord's real presence under the Eucharistic species, reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and other documents of the Church's Magisterium in the same sense and with the same words that the Council of Trent had proposed as a matter of faith, is proclaimed in the celebration of Mass not only by means of the very words of consecration, by which Christ becomes present through transubstantiation, but also by that interior disposition and outward expression of supreme reverence and adoration in which the Eucharistic Liturgy is carried out.

- 190 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp 368-373
- 191 cf the Easter Exsultet
- 192 Romano Guardini, *loc cit*
- 193 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1367, Council of Trent (1562): DS 1740;
cf 1 Corinthians 11:23; Hebrews 7:24, 27
- 194 cf Romans 6:10
- 195 Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 450, 668
- 196 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1367; Council of Trent (1562): DS 1743;
cf Hebrews 9:14, 27
- 197 Exodus 12:14

The Eucharistic Prayer: **The Memorial Acclamation (We proclaim the Mystery of Faith)**

*By dying, Christ showed what you are going to endure,
whether you wish to or not.
But by rising from the dead, He showed what you also will receive
if you lead a good life.*

- Sermon 279:9



We announce Your death we proclaim Your resurrection, and we pray ... ¹⁹⁸

The Greek word *mysterion* denotes something 'seen through squinting'; it is visible, but not clearly. St Paul says that "*at present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror.*" ¹⁹⁹ Ancient mirrors were not as clear as ours; yet by looking into a mirror, the ancients could see a fairly good reflection of reality.

Thus to say that we deal with 'sacred mysteries' ²⁰⁰ when we celebrate the liturgy does not mean that we are entering into rites that are impossible to comprehend. But at the same time they are beyond us in the best sense, because they transcend human space and time. The liturgy opens the door to the eternal.

*In the holiest part of the Mass, in the midst of the transubstantiation, the Church herself rings out the words, *mysterium fidei*! Where is the impenetrability of divine mystery more apparent than here? Let us respect it rather than attempt to explain. Leaving the "how" in all the density of its mystery, let us inquire only into the "what".*

What, then, is the Eucharist? It is Christ in His self-surrender, the eternal reality of the suffering and death of the Lord immortalised in a form that permits us to draw from it vitality for our spiritual life as concrete as food and drink from which we draw our physical strength.

Let this stand as it is. Any attempt to "spiritualise" or "purify" it must destroy it. It is presumption and incredulity to try to fix the limits of the possible. God says what He wills, and what He wills, is. He alone, "to the end", sets the form and measure of His love (Jn 13: 1) ...

It is certain that the disciples did not grasp the full meaning of what their Lord had done. But it is equally certain that they did not interpret it merely as a symbol of community and surrender, or an act of commemoration and spiritual intervention, but rather along the lines of the first Passover in Egypt, of the paschal feast they had just completed, and of the sacrificial rite celebrated day after day in the Temple. What had happened? Theology is constantly wrestling with the answer; yet one cannot avoid the feeling that this part of its effort has remained singularly unsuccessful. Perhaps it is just as well. .. ²⁰¹

The mystery of faith is the Paschal Mystery: Christ dying, rising and present amongst His people. It is the complete plan of God the Father, now realised in Christ's saving love. ²⁰² Just as the reasons why people fall in love are often a mystery to all but those who love, so the Eucharistic Mystery is incomprehensible except to those who have discovered the love of Christ for us.

2. The sacrificial nature of the Mass, solemnly declared by the Council of Trent in accordance with the Church's universal tradition, was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which offered these significant words about the Mass; 'At the Last Supper our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood, by which He would perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, thus entrusting to the Church, His beloved Bride, the memorial of His Death and Resurrection.

15.1 After the Consecration when the priest has said; *Mysterium fidei* (Let us proclaim the mystery of faith), the people sing or say an acclamation using one of the prescribed formulas.

198 from an ancient Christian liturgy

199 1 Corinthians 13:12

200 cf introduction to the Act of Penitence in the Mass

201 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp 368-373

202 cf Ephesians 1:9

The Eucharistic Prayer: **The Anamnesis (Remembering what Christ has done for us)**

It is plain enough to see that the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection is a figure of the death of our old sinful life, and our rising to new life. Here is shown forth the abolition of iniquity and the renewal of righteousness, through the faith given us by Jesus Christ.

— On Christ the True Healer 10



79 e. The Church, fulfilling the command that she received from Christ the Lord through the Apostles, keeps the memorial of Christ, recalling especially his blessed Passion, glorious Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven.

We, then, remembering Your death and Your Resurrection, offer bread and wine. We give You thanks for having judged us worthy to stand before You and serve You ... ²⁰³

The entire Eucharistic Prayer, with the consecratory words of institution at its centre, is a memorial, a remembering (*zikkaron* in Hebrew, *anamnesis* in Greek) that is so powerful that it actually makes present God's saving deeds in Christ. Thus their fullness and power are not left behind in history, but are present and take their effect here and now.

From earliest times, the Church has expressed the implications of Christ's command to "*do this in memory of Me*" ²⁰⁴ by a special prayer called the *Anamnesis* which expresses in clear language the meaning of the Eucharistic memorial. It is a statement that links the act of consecration to the act of offering in one sacrificial action: "Remembering ... we offer ... "

In our various forms of the Eucharistic Prayer, the wording of the *Anamnesis* varies. But it always embraces the full Paschal Mystery, calling to mind Christ's Passion and Death, His Resurrection, His Ascension into glory and His return at the end of time.

This last article of faith is often overlooked, yet it is of utmost importance. It is proclaimed in the Nicene Creed: *He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and of His Kingdom there will be no end.* It is proclaimed in the Memorial Acclamations that prepare the way for the *Anamnesis*. And it is the continuing faith of the Church: *The Church celebrates the mystery of her Lord "until He comes," when "God will be everything to everyone." Since the apostolic age, the liturgy has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit's groaning in the Church: "Marana tha!" The liturgy thus shares in Jesus' desire: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you ... until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."* ²⁰⁵

Our remembering is a window into God's *kairos*, bringing both past and future together into the present moment. We recall Christ's death and resurrection - past events that have effected our salvation. But we also recall Christ's *parousia*, His return in glory – the future event that will reveal *that God's justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by His creatures, and that God's love is stronger than death.* ²⁰⁶

Sharing in the Eucharist, we share in Christ's mission of justice and love. Each celebration of the Mass should instill in us a sense of urgency to unite ourselves more intimately to the Lord Jesus in His suffering and death by our own struggle to conquer selfishness. Then, as we rise with Him in triumph over sin by dying to ourselves, we can look forward, not in fear, but "*with joyful hope to the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*" ²⁰⁷

203 St Hippolytus, loc cit

204 cf words of Consecration in the Eucharistic Prayer; cf also 1 Corinthians 11:24-25; 22:19

205 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1130, cf 1 Corinthians 11:26; 14:28; 16:22; Revelation 22:20; Luke 22:15; Marana tha! means "Come, Lord Jesus!"

206 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1040; cf Song of Songs 8:6

207 cf conclusion of the Embolism of the Mass

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: **The Prayer for the Clergy**

*"Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labour in vain," declares the Psalmist.
Who are those who labour to build it?
All those who in the Church preach the word of God:
the ministers of God's sacraments.*

- On Psalm 126:1



79 g. Expression is given to the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated in communion with the entire Church.

The Jewish *berakah* or prayer of blessing over the cup included various formulas asking God to show mercy upon the People of Israel, to send Elijah and the Messiah, and to restore the House of David. In line with this tradition, the Eucharistic Prayer includes intercessions for various groups of people: the bishops and clergy, all the faithful, and the departed.

In the Church of Alexandria in Egypt, these intercessions were prayed before the consecratory Institution Narrative, while at Antioch they were inserted after the *Anamnesis* and post-consecratory *Epiklesis*. The Roman Canon (Eucharistic Prayer 1) includes intercessions before and after the Consecration, while the other Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman rite follow the Antiochene tradition and place all the intercessions toward the end.

In the Patristic Era, deacons would announce the names of the living and dead to be remembered in prayer, reading them from *diptychs*, two wooden tablets hinged together. The name of the Bishop of Rome was included in all churches at that time, as well as the name of the local bishop. It was, and still is, a serious obligation to pray for the Pope and the local bishop during the Eucharistic Prayer: *Let us all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows His Father, and the college of presbyters as the apostles. Respect the deacons as you do God's law. Let no one do anything concerning the Church in separation from the bishop ... without the bishop there is no Eucharist.* ²⁰⁸

The early Church also prayed faithfully for the bishop's assisting clergy: *We call on You, Saviour and Lord, God of all flesh and Lord of every spirit, You who are blessed and do dispense all blessing: make holy our bishop ... we pray You too for those who are priests with him ... make the deacons holy, too ...* ²⁰⁹

It is most fitting and appropriate that we pray in a special way for our bishops and clergy during the Eucharistic Prayer. After all, it was in the company of the Twelve that Jesus instituted the Eucharist we celebrate, and it was to them that He entrusted the power to continue His sacrificial act "until He comes again." This has been the consistent faith of the Church from ancient times: *Jesus gave (the apostles) this command: "Do this in memory of Me." And it was to them alone that He gave these words.* ²¹⁰

It was the feet of His first priests, the Apostles, that Jesus washed as a reminder of their call to service before He gave us this Mystery of faith. ²¹¹ *The bishop and priests sanctify the Church by their prayer and work, by their ministry of the Word and the sacraments. They sanctify her by their example, "not by domineering over those in their charge but being examples to the flock." Thus, "together with the flock entrusted to them, they may attain to eternal life."* ²¹²

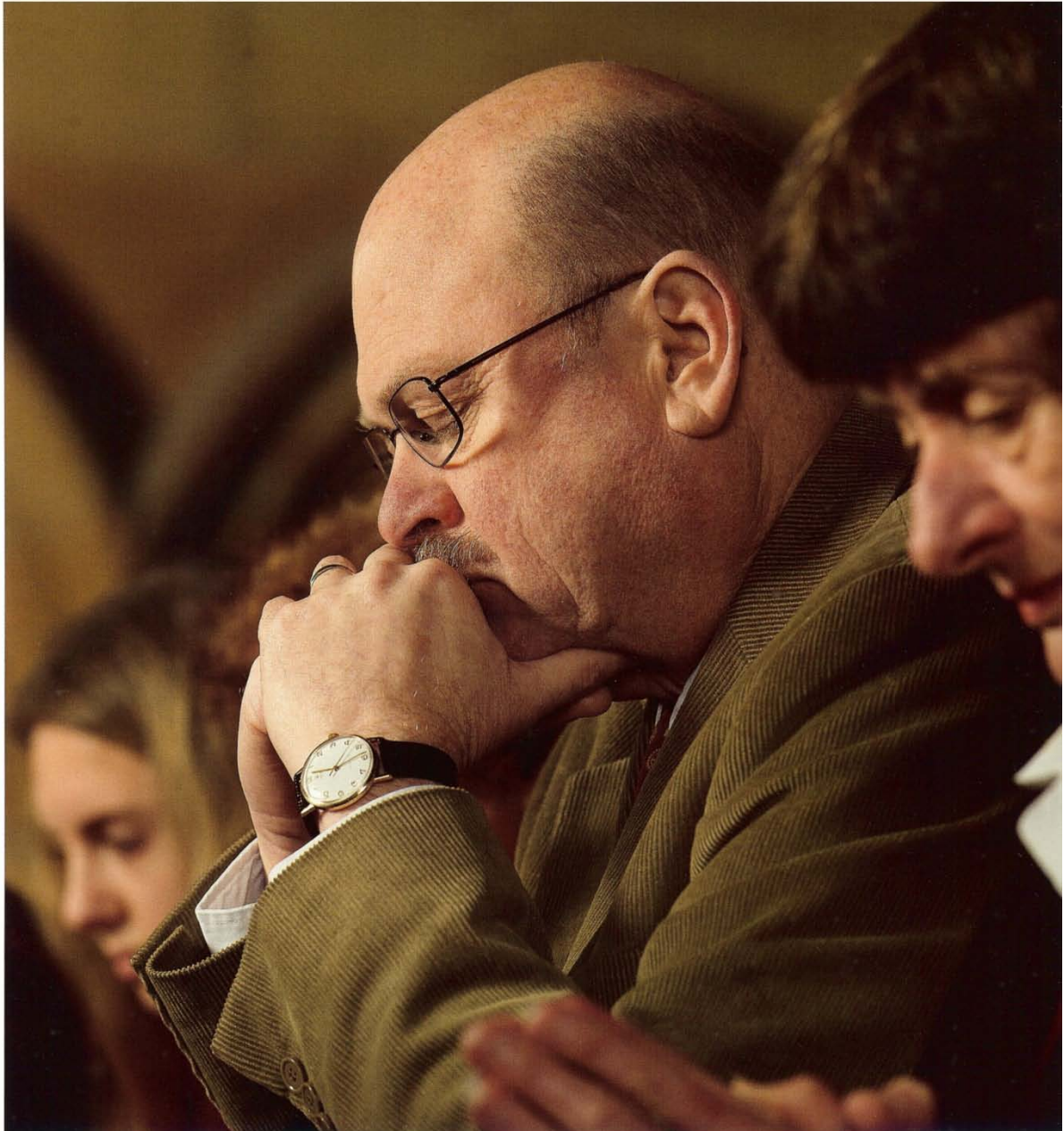
Theirs is an awesome privilege but also a weighty responsibility, and so at this moment we remember them in our prayers: our Holy Father the Pope, our local Bishop, and all the clergy.

- 208 St Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Church of Smyrna, 8:1
- 209 Euchology, The Sunday Synaxis, 11
- 210 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65-66
- 211 cf John 13:1-17
- 212 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 893; cf 1 Peter 5:3; Lumen Gentium 26:3

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: **The Prayer for the Faithful Departed**

*The souls of our beloved dead are not separated from the Church,
which even now is the kingdom of Christ;
otherwise there would be no remembrance made of them at the altar of God
in the partaking of the body of Christ.*

-- The City of God 9:13:66



79 g. . . . the offering is made for the Church and for all her members, living and dead, who have been called to participate in the redemption and the salvation purchased by Christ's Body and Blood.

The *diptychs* were typical writing tablets of the classical age: wooden boards with one side covered with wax, upon which names could be etched (or erased) with a stylus. They were hinged together so that they could be closed to protect the writing. One board contained the names of the living, the other held the names of the dead.

After announcing the names of the bishop and clergy, a deacon would say something similar to this prayer from an ancient Christian liturgy: *We pray You, too, for all the dead who have fallen asleep, whom we call to mind. (After recalling the names:) Sanctify these souls, for You know them all. Sanctify those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. Number them with Your holy Powers, give them a place and a dwelling in Your Kingdom.* ²¹³

Having requested the help of the unifying Spirit, the worshipping assembly petitions the Father that salvation and mercy be granted, not only to those present, but to all the members of the Church, including the dead. In so doing, we unite ourselves to Christ Who *lives for ever to make intercession.* ²¹⁴

That this intercession includes the departed is a constant teaching of the Church: *From the beginning, the Church has honoured the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that, thus purified, they may attain the Beatific Vision of God.* ²¹⁵

During a Mass being offered in particular for the dead (a funeral Mass, or a Mass on the anniversary of a death), the name may be mentioned by the priest. But it is recommended that those present at Mass silently name those they wish to include in this intercession for the faithful departed. In this way we enter more personally into the Eucharistic Prayer and make it our own. We come closer to the reality that at Mass we have "one foot on earth, and the other in eternity." St John Chrysostom fervently recommends this: *Let us help and commemorate the dead. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice, why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? Let us not hesitate to help those who have died, and to offer our prayers for them.* ²¹⁶



- 213 Eucharology, Prayer of the Anaphora
- 214 Hebrews 7:25
- 215 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1032; cf Council of Lyons II (1274): DS 856
- 216 St John Chrysostom, Homily on 1 Corinthians 41:5

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Invocation of Mary and the Saints

*Can anyone doubt that the Lord will share His life with the saints
when He has already given them His death?*

- Sermon 218c:1



The liturgy reaches beyond the bounds of time to this extent: that the body which is praying on earth knows itself to be at one with those for whom time no longer exists, who, being perfected, exist in eternity. ²¹⁷

The Eucharist is *the pledge of future glory*.²¹⁸ It is right, then, that the Church on earth, the "Church Militant", also recalls during its Eucharistic Prayer the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Apostles, the Martyrs and all the Saints who already share in the heavenly Banquet announced and prefigured by the Eucharist. We pray: *Make us worthy to share eternal life with ... all the saints who have done Your will throughout the ages. May we praise You in union with them, and give You glory through Your Son, Jesus Christ.*²¹⁹

In fact, the Church in Heaven, the "Church Triumphant" is present with us as we pray, encouraging us who are on earth to persevere in our Christian calling until we, too, attain eternal life with God: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us, and persevere in running the race that lies before us, while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader of faith and the One Who makes it perfect.*²²⁰

This prayerful union with the saints in Heaven is, again, a way in which the Church expresses its willingness to leave earthly time, *chronos*, behind while we participate in Christ's sacrifice, and enter into God's eternal *kairos*. We acknowledge that although the saints of the past may be invisible to us at present, they are very much alive in Christ and with us in the unity of God's people. *In the glory of Heaven, the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other people and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with Him "they shall reign for ever and ever."*²²¹

The patron saint of a place, and a saint being commemorated on a particular date in the liturgical calendar, may be mentioned by name in the Mass. They and all the rest of the saints in Heaven surely join St Therese of the Child Jesus in her firm promise: *"I will spend my Heaven doing good upon the earth."*²²² Indeed, the saints *share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives, the transmission of their writings, and their prayer today. They contemplate God, praise Him, and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. When they entered into the joy of their Master, they were "put in charge of many things." Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world.*

223

- 217 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp 141-149
- 218 St Thomas Aquinas, Magnificat antiphon for Second Vespers of Corpus Christi
- 219 Eucharistic Prayer II
- 220 Hebrews 12:1
- 221 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1029; cf Revelation 22:5; Matthew 25:21, 23
- 222 St Therese of Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul*
- 223 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2683; cf Matthew 25:21

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Prayer for Us All

*There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love,
we shall love and praise.*

*And then, what will be at the end without end?
For what other end do we have in life,
if not to reach the Kingdom which has no end?*

• The City of God 22:30:5



79 f. In this very memorial, the Church – and in particular the Church here and now gathered – offers in the Holy Spirit the spotless Victim to the Father. The Church's intention, however, is that the faithful not only offer this spotless Victim but also learn to offer themselves, and so day by day to be consummated, through Christ the Mediator, into unity with God and with each other, so that at last God may be all in all.

Accept the thanksgiving of Your people. Bless those who have presented to You these offerings and thanksgivings. Give all this people health, prosperity and happiness, all good things of soul and body. ²²⁴

Intercessions for the bishops and clergy, for the faithful departed, and the invocation of the saints, culminate in our petition to *have mercy on us all*. ²²⁵ The entire Church – in Heaven, on earth and in Purgatory - is bound together in the Communion of Saints. All of us form one Body in Christ; all of us participate in the liturgy together.

The liturgy is not celebrated by the individual, but by the body of the faithful. This is not composed merely of the persons who may be present in church; it is not just the assembled congregation. On the contrary, it reaches out beyond the bounds of space to embrace all the faithful on earth ... The faithful are actively united by a vital and fundamental principle common to them all. That principle is Christ Himself; His life is ours, we are incorporated in Him, we are His Body, the Mystical Body of Christ. The active force which governs this living unity, grafting each individual onto it, granting them a share in its fellowship and preserving this right for them, is the Holy Spirit. Every individual Catholic is a cell of this living organism or a member of His Body. ²²⁶

Praying with and for one another is an expression of faith that we are truly one Body. If we believe in *the life of the world to come*, ²²⁷ and if we subscribe to the belief that through the liturgy the future becomes present to us, then Heaven touches earth during Holy Mass, and we are not cut off from those who have preceded us into eternity. And we are linked to members of the Church in every place on earth.

The Roman Canon says it well: *Remember, Lord, Your people, especially those for whom we now pray ... Remember all of us gathered here before You. You know how firmly we believe in You and dedicate ourselves to You. We offer You this sacrifice of praise for ourselves and those who are dear to us. We pray to You, our living and true God, for our well-being and redemption. In union with the whole Church ...* ²²⁸

The Greek word *catholikos*, 'catholic', means 'universal'. This means that the Church is present in all lands, in all places, and in all times - past, present and future. In the words of an ancient liturgy: *As this Bread was scattered on the mountains, the hills and in the valleys, and was gathered to become a single Body ... as too this Wine, sprung from the holy vine of David, and this water,*

sprung from the spotless Lamb, were mixed and became a single Mystery, so too do You gather the catholic Church of Jesus Christ. ²²⁹

- 224 Euchology, Prayer of the Anaphora, 13
- 225 Eucharistic Prayer II
- 226 Romano Guardini, op cit, pp 141-149; 1918; cf Romans 12:4 ff; Ephesians 1-4; Collosians 1:15 ff; et al
- 227 Nicene Creed
- 228 Eucharistic Prayer I
- 229 Der Balyzeh manuscript, 192

THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER: The Final Doxology (A final word of praise)

*We pray through Christ, with Christ, in Christ.
We pray along with Him, and He prays along with us.*

-On Palm 85:1



The conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer as we pray it today finds its origin in one of the Church's earliest liturgies, the Eucharistic Prayer of St Hippolytus (upon which our Eucharistic Prayer II is partly based): *Through Him, glory to You, and honour, to the Father and to the Son, with the Holy Spirit, in Your holy Church, now and for ever. Amen.* ²³⁰

The Final Doxology summarises the Eucharistic Prayer, which ends, as it began, on a note of praise: *All glory and honour is Yours.* The text is Trinitarian, being directed to the *almighty Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit.* And it emphasises Christ - *through Him, with Him, in Him* - in His role as Mediator: *For there is one God. There is also one Mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, Himself human, Who gave Himself as ransom for all.* ²³¹

Christ is the High Priest Who is truly present in the sacrificial memorial. It is Christ Who offers Himself to the Church's faithful.

The Church, in its turn, unites itself in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the epiphany of Christ's Body, both sacramental and ecclesial.

The priest lifts the consecrated elements, raising them on high in a final gesture of offering to God the Father. *The 'great' elevation first appears in the Middle Ages and is connected with the question that was debated at that time, namely: At exactly what point in the Eucharistic Prayer did the change in the elements take place?* ²³² Obviously, having such a dramatic elevation at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Prayer underscores the Church's faith that the entire Prayer as a whole is a prayer of consecration, the heart and summit of the Eucharistic celebration. ²³³

It is the priest alone (or concelebrating priests together) who proclaims the Final Doxology, ²³⁴ just as the priest alone prays aloud the Trinitarian conclusions of other prayers (Collect, Prayer over the Gifts, Prayer after Communion).

As in all other prayers of the Mass, the people give their assent according to ancient tradition: *When he has finished, all the people present acclaim it (the Eucharistic Prayer), saying: "Amen". Amen is a Hebrew word which means: so be it.* ²³⁵ St Augustine once remarked that the people in his cathedral, the *Basilica Pacis* in Hippo, North Africa, would sing the Great Amen so loudly and strongly that he was sometimes afraid the roof would collapse! ²³⁶

An assembly conscious of its spiritual reality as the Body of Christ, hierarchically ordered amongst its clergy and laity, will pray "through, with and in Christ" and assent to His one perfect sacrifice, like St Augustine's people, with a resounding acclamation: *Amen*.

79 h. The glorification of God is expressed and is confirmed and concluded by the people's acclamation: Amen

230 St Hippolytus, loc cit

231 1 Timothy 2:5-6a

232 Bernhard Kleinheyer, *The Meaning of the Sacramental Symbols*, p 87

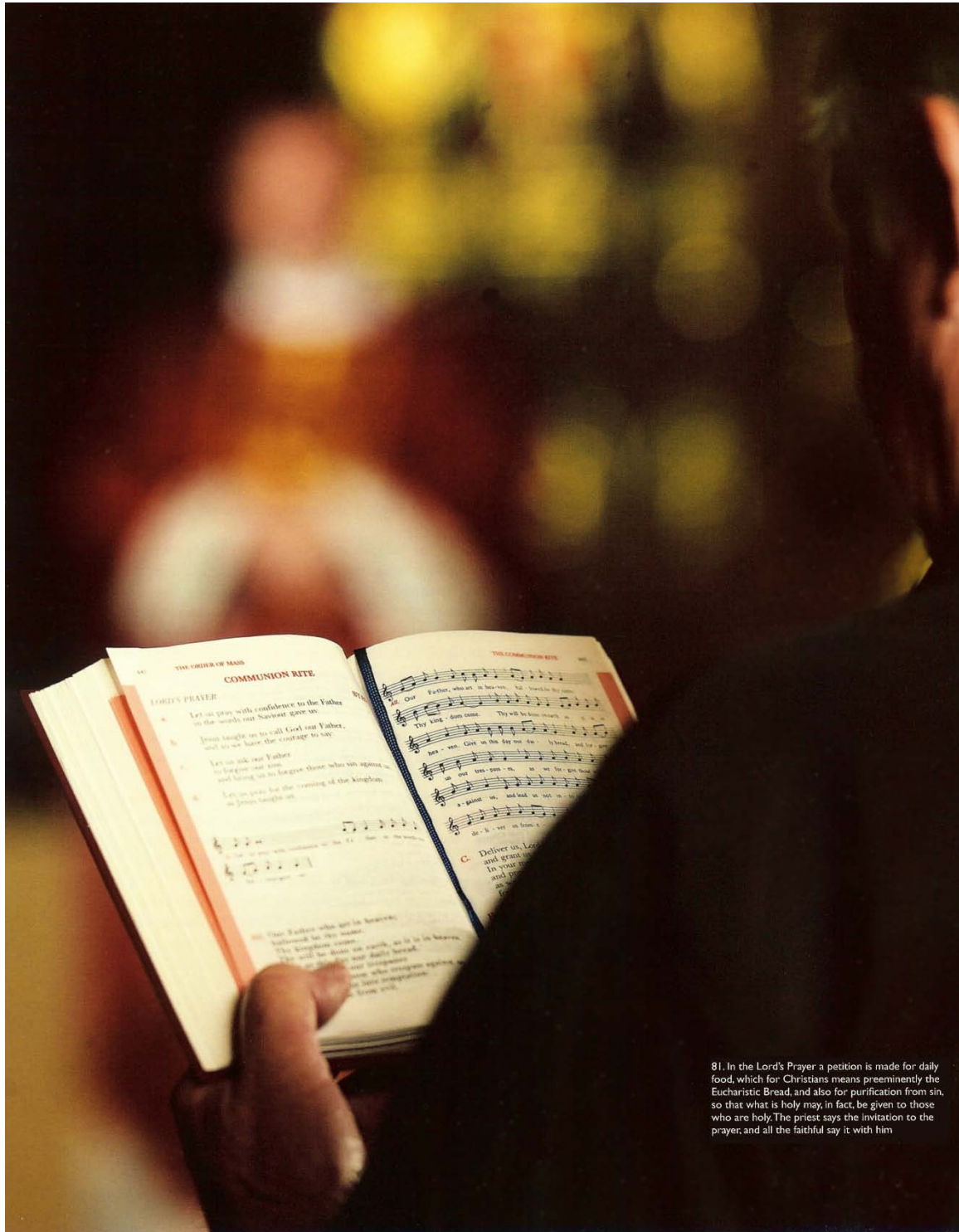
233 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1352

234 cf GIRM no. 151

235 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65

236 St Augustine, *Sermons*

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Lord's Prayer (Pater Noster)



81. In the Lord's Prayer a petition is made for daily food, which for Christians means preeminently the Eucharistic Bread, and also for purification from sin, so that what is holy may, in fact, be given to those who are holy. The priest says the invitation to the prayer, and all the faithful say it with him.

Within the context of the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer was originally prayed immediately after the Breaking of the Bread. The influence of St Augustine's (354-430) teaching caused Pope St Gregory the Great (r 590-604) to relocate it to its present place, linking it closely to the Eucharistic Prayer.

Two versions of the Lord's Prayer are found in the Gospels: Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-13. The latter is the one that now enjoys a unique place in Christian spirituality and worship. The early Christians prayed it three times a day, ²³⁷ in place of the Eighteen Benedictions customary in Jewish piety.

Just as the Eucharistic Prayer is a unified whole consisting of various prayers, intercessions and acclamations, so the Lord's Prayer includes a prefacing address (*Our Father Who art in Heaven*), acclamations (*Hallowed be Thy Name! Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven!*) and petitions (*Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*).

The first part of the prayer follows well from the Final Doxology of the Eucharistic Prayer, whilst the second part, which speaks of bread and forgiveness, looks ahead to Holy Communion. ²³⁸

It is a communal prayer, essentially rooted in the liturgy: *"The Lord teaches us to make prayer in common for all our brethren. For He did not say 'My Father Who art in Heaven,' but 'our' Father, offering petitions for the common Body."* ²³⁹

It is an ideal prayer of preparation for Communion, which we share as sisters and brothers. *Jesus once warned against domination in any form: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi'; for one is your Master, and all of you are brothers." This is the beginning of the Christian 'we.' The faithful are to be bound to each other in mutual fraternity. They are the family of God, in which all are brothers and sisters and one with the Father. St Paul completes the thought with great depth and beauty when he calls Christ 'the firstborn among many brethren.'* *The communal spirit finds expression in the ethos of the Sermon on the Mount; in the Our Father it crystallises into prayer.* ²⁴⁰

When Moses came upon the Burning Bush, he was told: *"Do not come near. Put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* ²⁴¹ In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus grants us access to His Father as our own: *"Here I am - I and the children God has given me."* ²⁴² The priest at Mass invites us, then: *"Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Saviour gave us."* ²⁴³

Finally, the Lord's Prayer, as another anamnesis, remembers the eschatological concept of the Kingdom present-and-yet-to-come. It is the prayer of a people who celebrate *the mystery of salvation already accomplished, once for all, in Christ Crucified and Risen.* ²⁴⁴ It is truly *the most perfect of prayers.* ²⁴⁵

"Run through all the words of the holy prayers in Scripture, and I do not think that you will find anything in them that is not contained and included in the Lord's Prayer." ²⁴⁶

Before you approach the altar, note well what you say:

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

If you forgive others, God will forgive you.

- On John's Gospel 26:1

237 cf Didache 8:3

238 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2770

239 St John Chrysostom, Homily on Matthew 19:4

240 Romano Guardini, *The Lord*, pp 238-242; 1937; cf Matthew 23:8-12; Romans 8:29

241 Exodus 3:5

242 Hebrews 2:13b; Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2777

243 introduction to the Lord's Prayer at Mass

244 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2771

245 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1-11, 83, 9

246 St Augustine, Letter 130:12, 22

THE COMMUNION RITE: **Libera Me (Deliverance from evil, deliverance into the Kingdom)**

*Eat the Bread of heaven in a spiritual way.
Come to It freed from sin.
Even though your sins occur daily,
at least see to it that they be not mortal.*

- On John's Gospel 26:11



81. The priest alone adds the Embolism, which the people conclude with a Doxology. The Embolism, enlarging upon the last petition of the Lord's Prayer itself, begs deliverance from the power of evil for the entire community of the faithful.

In the early Church liturgical document, the *Didache*, we find this prayer: *Remember, Lord, Your Church, to deliver her from all evil, to make her perfect in Your love. Gather her from the four winds, this Church You have sanctified, into the Kingdom You have prepared for her. For power and glory are Yours for ever. Amen.* ²⁴⁷

The final petition of the Lord's Prayer, *Deliver us from evil*, is followed by an expansion of this request. Thus this prayer is known as the Embolism, from the Greek word for "insertion". It would seem, from the prayer quoted above from the *Didache*, that early forms of the Embolism date from the Christian liturgies of the first century.

The Embolism prays for peace, previewing the prayer for and sign of peace. It asks that we be kept free from sin and protected from all anxiety, evoking the Lamb of God Who takes away our sins and grants us peace. It affirms us as a Church awaiting the coming of our Lord and Saviour, repeating the eschatological acclamation of God's Kingdom.

This last statement leads into an acclamation by the people: *For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours, now and for ever!* The acclamation was sometimes inserted into the text of the Scriptures in various places, especially at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, by pious manuscript copyists. This practice is perhaps due to the influence of the Byzantine liturgical tradition, which deemed the acclamation a more positive conclusion to the Lord's Prayer than *Deliver us from evil*. Because the acclamation was found in some ancient bible manuscripts, Protestant scholars of the Reformation era considered it a part of the Lord's Prayer itself. It has become famous in its King James Version translation as *For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for ever! Amen.*

For centuries, this acclamation was never a part of Catholic liturgical tradition, nor was it in use everywhere in the Eastern Churches. St Cyril of Jerusalem, in his Catechetical Sermons preached in the year 350, comments on the Lord's Prayer, petition by petition. After speaking about *Deliver us from evil*, he says: *"Then, after the prayer has been completed, you say: 'Amen.'"*

However, the spirit of ecumenism which swept through the Church as a result of the Second Vatican Council influenced those charged with liturgical renewal to insert the acclamation, not at the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer itself, but at the end of the Embolism. The Embolism itself ends with words from St Paul's

Letter to Titus: ... *as we await the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory ... of our Saviour Jesus Christ.* ²⁴⁸ The acclamation is a fitting way to complete the Embolism, echoing the early words of the Lord's Prayer: *Thy Kingdom come!*

247 Didache

248 Titus 2:13

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Prayer for Peace

*Let all live together in harmony and love,
and honour God in each other,
because you have become His temples.*

Rule for Monasteries 2



82. The Rite of Peace follows, by which the Church asks for peace and unity for herself and for the whole human family.

When the Risen Christ appeared to His disciples in the Upper Room, He said to them, *"Peace be with you."* ²⁴⁹ The Hebrew word *shalom*, which Jesus would have used as His greeting, is a wish that a person experience all possible prosperity. It is the state of a person who lives in complete harmony with nature, self and God. It is a call to reconciliation, unity and communion.

Jesus' greeting of peace would have reminded the Apostles of His words to them in that same Upper Room only a few days earlier, on Holy Thursday: *"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives peace do I give it to you."* ²⁵⁰

How does the world give peace? By signing treaties to reduce the number of nuclear weapons, by drawing lines of demilitarisation, by declaring temporary periods of cease-fire. And people can breathe more easily - for a while.

But the Church teaches that *peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of power between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is 'the tranquility of order'. Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.* ²⁵¹

Jesus' intention is clear: there is a direct connection between the Eucharist and peace. His greeting to His disciples, offered on Easter Sunday evening when He had accomplished our redemption through His dying and rising, was the fulfilment of His promise of peace made when He prayed His 'Priestly Prayer' at the Last Supper. If our Eucharistic assembly is truly a gathering in fraternal charity, then peace must be the fruit of that charity. ²⁵²

Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, the messianic 'Prince of Peace.' By the Blood of His Cross, "in His own person He killed the hostility", He reconciled humanity with God and made His Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. ²⁵³

Charity produces peace, and peace brings forth unity. As we move toward the moment of Holy Communion, the priest prays a prayer for peace. He echoes the words of the Priestly Prayer of Christ, and then he asks the Lord not to consider our sins but rather to consider our faith, and grant us peace and unity.

Receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion requires that we be in 'communion' with the Lord. This spiritual communion is a threefold task:

- 1) accepting Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, confessing and repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Him;
- 2) acknowledging and living according to His teachings, which have been entrusted to the Church which He founded;
- 3) making peace with our brothers and sisters.

The first two tasks of 'communion' are liturgically celebrated in the Act of Penitence and the Profession of Faith. The third, the task of peace, is addressed in the Prayer for Peace and the subsequent exchange of the Sign of Peace.

St Paul says of Christ: "*He is our peace.*" ²⁵⁴ And Jesus Himself counsels us to be serious about the task of peace: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" ²⁵⁵ It is in His Kingdom of unity and peace that He lives for ever and ever. If we want to join Him in that Kingdom, then we must join Him in the work of peace.

249 Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21

250 John 14:27

251 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2304; cf St Augustine, *The City of God*, 19, 13, 1; Isaiah 32:17; *Lumen Gentium*, The Constitution of the Church, 78:1-2

252 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1829

253 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2305; cf Isaiah 9:5; Ephesians 2:16

254 Colossians 1:20-22

255 Matthew 5:9

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Sign of Peace

Immediately after the Our Father, the words "Peace be with you" are said.

A great sacrament lies in this kiss of peace, so let your kiss be the expression of a true love.

Do not be Judas!

He kissed Christ with his lips, while in his heart he was already plotting against Him.

-- Sermon against Dionysius 6:3



82. The faithful express to each other their ecclesial communion and mutual charity before communicating in the Sacrament. It is, however, appropriate that each person offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest and in a sober manner: . . . The most common form of the gesture of peace is the handshake, although different practices according to region and culture are not excluded

The bishop then greets the assembly, saying: "The peace of God be with you all." The people reply: "And with thy spirit." The deacon then says to all: "Greet one another with a holy kiss." The clergy then give the kiss of peace to the bishop, laymen give it to laymen, and women to women. ²⁵⁶

Originally the greeting of peace was exchanged before the Liturgy of the Eucharist, as a conclusion to the General Intercessions: *When the prayers are finished, we give each other the kiss of peace.* ²⁵⁷ Then the Eucharistic gifts were brought forward. This was to relate the Sign of Peace to the words of

Jesus in the Gospel: *"If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

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The transfer of the greeting to the point just before Communion began in North Africa and extended throughout the West in the 4th and 5th centuries. Pope Innocent I (d 417) defended its new location *"as a sign of the people's acquiescence in all that has been done in these mysteries."* ²⁵⁹ This is because the kiss of peace was seen by early Christians as a seal placed on prayer, like an 'Amen'. Today this connection has been lost, and the focus at this moment in the sacred liturgy is on peace, reconciliation and unity.

But Jesus Himself gives yet another emphasis: deliverance from fear. *"Peace be with you!"* was the greeting given by the Risen Lord on the evening of the day of His resurrection to the disciples who were gathered behind closed doors *"for fear of the Jews."* ²⁶⁰ It is the salvation promised in this greeting that has the power to deliver the community from fear and to make possible its mission to the world. *"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* ²⁶¹ Being a Christian, then, means being gifted with the peace of God, being called to obtain God's salvation, and so to proclaim this peace to the world. ²⁶²

The Sign of Peace has varied in form. Early Christians exchanged the 'kiss of peace', an embrace of greeting akin to that exchanged by most southern Europeans and Middle Eastern people. In medieval England, parishioners would kiss a *pax brede* or 'peace board' – a small tablet of wood or metal that was kissed by the celebrant and then passed around the congregation. For a time, the Sign of Peace was shared only amongst the clergy at a solemn Mass. In our time, this gesture takes the form of the Western handshake, the Eastern bow, or the liturgical embrace.

It is the custom in both Eastern and Western liturgical traditions that the people remain in their places and exchange this greeting with their immediate neighbours, following the priest's greeting of the entire assembly, *"The peace of the Lord be with you always"* and their response. Special occasions such as weddings or funerals provide for the priest exchanging the Sign of Peace with a few individuals in addition to the liturgical ministers. However, for him to leave the altar and attempt to greet as many as possible needlessly accentuates his own role and obscures the understanding of Christ's presence in the entire assembly as the people share His peace.

The Sign of Peace is a 'seal' which ratifies not only the Eucharistic Mystery, but the mystery of the Eucharistic assembly whose members find Christ and His peace in their love for one another.

256 The Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 11, 7-9

257 cf Didache; St Justin Martyr, op cit

258 Matthew 5:23-24

259 Pope Innocent 1, Letters Vol 2: to Decentio Augubino 1:4

260 John 20:19

261 John 20:21

262 cf Bernhard Kleinheyer, op cit, p 136

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Breaking of Bread (Agnus Dei)



The early Church prayed: *We give You thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge that You have revealed to us through Jesus, Your Child. Glory to You for ever! Just as this bread which we break, once scattered over the hills, has been gathered and made one, so may Your Church too be assembled from the ends of the earth into Your Kingdom. For glory and power are Yours for ever.* ²⁶³

At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread, blessed it, and then broke it. In so doing He was following the rite of the Passover celebration. Ever since then, the Breaking of the Bread has been the most important action preparatory to the distribution of the Eucharist. The symbolism already attached to this gesture in Judaism is essential: through eating the one Bread, broken into pieces and distributed to all, the table fellowship comes into existence. In this way, it is a sharing in the Body of Christ.

Anyone who has been present when a large Host is broken to be shared by all who are participating in that Mass will have found it easier to understand the meaning of this rite. It is clear at such celebrations why the early Church referred to the whole liturgy as 'the Breaking of the Bread.' ²⁶⁴

Over the centuries, as the people's sense of their own unworthiness led them to refrain from frequent reception of the Eucharist and the priest was often the only person who received Communion, the significance of this rite was greatly diminished. Today, with the majority of the assembly sharing in the Eucharist, it is important that this rite regain its proper place and easily be seen by the people, without being exaggerated or prolonged.

In the early Church, as an original community grew, making it impossible for everyone to attend one Mass with the bishop, pieces from his Host (the Eucharistic Bread, so-called from the Latin word *hostia*, or 'victim') were taken by acolytes to the new communities (what we know today as 'parishes'), placed under the leadership of presbyters ordained by the bishop. Upon receiving the particle (called the *fermentum* or 'leaven') of the Eucharist, the local presbyter would put it into the chalice containing the Precious Blood, signifying the community's unity with the bishop.

In addition to its meaning as a sign of table fellowship and Church unity, the Fraction also signifies the Resurrection of Christ and our share in His risen life. Note that the bread and wine are consecrated separately, reminding us of the death of Jesus when His side was pierced with a lance "*and immediately blood and water flowed out.*" ²⁶⁵ In the Fraction rite, the fermentum put into the

Precious Blood symbolises the reunion of Christ's soul and body in the Resurrection. The priest prays: *May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.* ²⁶⁶

The litany, "*Lamb of God, You take away the sins of the world*" with its responses, "*have mercy on us ... grant us peace*" is meant to accompany this rite, not follow it. It serves as a link between the Sign of Peace and the Invitation to Holy Communion, which begins immediately at the litany's conclusion. And it underscores the Passover connection of the Breaking of the Bread, reminding us that "*we were ransomed ... with the precious Blood of Christ as of a spotless, unblemished Lamb.*" ²⁶⁷ Every Eucharist is a memorial of the new Passover of Christ Who brings us forgiveness, mercy, and peace.

83. The priest breaks the Eucharistic Bread, assisted, if the case calls for it, by the deacon or a concelebrant. Christ's gesture of breaking bread at the Last Supper, which gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name in apostolic times, signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life which is Christ, who died and rose for the salvation of the world ... This rite is reserved to the priest and the deacon.

The priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the Host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the living and glorious Body of Jesus Christ. The supplication *Agnus Dei* is, as a rule, sung by the choir or cantor with the congregation responding; or it is at least recited aloud. This invocation accompanies the Fraction and for this reason may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite has reached its conclusion, the last time ending with the words: *dona nobis pacem* (grant us peace).

321. The meaning of the sign demands that the material for the Eucharistic celebration truly have the appearance of food. It is therefore expedient that the Eucharistic bread, even though unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, be made in such a way that the priest at Mass with a congregation is able in practice to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the faithful. Small hosts are, however, in no way ruled out when the number of those receiving Holy Communion or other pastoral needs require it. The action of the Fraction or Breaking of Bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, will bring out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one Bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters.

*The Disciples did not recognise Christ until He broke the bread.
Indeed, if you do not eat and drink judgment upon yourself in the
Breaking of Bread, you, too, will know Christ.*

- 2nd Homily on John 2:1

- 263 Didache
- 264 cf Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 5:7
- 265 John 19:34
- 266 prayer from the Fraction rite
- 267 1 Peter 1:18-19

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Prayer before Holy Communion

*All who eat the Lord's Flesh and drink His Blood
must consider what they eat and drink.
To avoid eating and drinking unto condemnation,
let them live well.*

- Sermon 132:1



84. The priest prepares himself by a prayer, said privately, that he may fruitfully receive Christ's Body and Blood. The faithful do the same, praying silently.

Let the bishop say: We entreat You again, almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: grant us to receive this holy Mystery with blessing. Do not condemn anyone among us. Let all those who receive this holy Mystery be made worthy of the Body and Blood of Christ, almighty Lord, our God. Let the deacon say: Pray. Let the bishop say: Almighty God, make us to be strengthened by receiving Your holy Mystery. Let it not condemn anyone among us, but bless us all through Christ. Through Him, glory to You and power, now and always, and for all eternity. Amen. ²⁶⁸

Various devotional prayers for the priest to say quietly before receiving Holy Communion developed in the Middle Ages, principally in France. These prayers were directed to Christ, present on the altar in the Eucharist, and were intended to support the personal piety of the priest celebrant. Eventually three of these prayers were selected for use in the 1570 Missal of Pope St Pius V.

One of the prayers is now used as the Prayer for Peace before the exchange of the Sign of Peace. The other two prayers remain, with the priest permitted to pray his choice of one or the other. They are beautiful prayers, whose sentiments are in keeping with those of the ancient prayer quoted above. Here are their texts:

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit, Your death brought life to the world. By Your holy Body and Blood free me from all my sins and from every evil. Keep me faithful to Your teaching, and never let me be parted from You.

Lord Jesus Christ, with faith in Your love and mercy I eat Your Body and drink Your Blood. Let it not bring me condemnation, but health in mind and body.

The idea of 'condemnation' may seem harsh and out of place to some. But it is a reflection of St Paul's warning to the Church in Corinth: *"A person should examine himself, and so eat the Bread and drink the Cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body, eats and drinks a condemnation unto himself."* ²⁶⁹

Priests, as local leaders of the Christian community, have a special obligation to maintain unity of heart and mind with their bishops. *The promise of obedience they make to the bishop at the moment of ordination, and the kiss of peace from him at the end of the ordination liturgy, mean that the bishop considers them his co-workers, his sons, his brothers and his friends, and that they in turn owe him love and obedience.* ²⁷⁰ Priests are also called to teach their people how to pray, not only by word but more importantly by example. When the people see that their priest demonstrates his own Eucharistic faith by his devout celebration of the sacred mysteries and especially by quietly communing with God in his own heart, even in brief moments such as this, they are inspired to be more devout and prayerful themselves. In this way, priest and people are prepared for a fruitful encounter with Christ in Holy Communion.

268 St Hippolytus, op cit, 43-4

269 1 Corinthians 11:28-29

270 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1567

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Invitation to Holy Communion



84. The priest next shows the faithful the Eucharistic Bread, holding It above the paten or above the chalice, and invites them to the banquet of Christ. Along with the faithful, he then makes an act of humility using the prescribed words taken from the Gospels.

Jesus describes Heaven as a wedding banquet to which many are invited. However, not all are prepared to enter the banquet hall because they are not appropriately dressed, i.e., they are not living in God's grace. Still others decline to attend at all, because they are busy doing other things. Our Lord concludes his parable with this quiet observation: *Many are invited, but few are chosen.* ²⁷¹

A formal invitation to receive the Lord's Body and Blood is found in nearly every ancient liturgy. The invitation used in many Eastern Churches is *Holy things to the holy!* In other words, only those who are sincerely trying to live holy lives should approach the altar. Others are welcome, but they should first repent, availing themselves of the Sacrament of Penance, before receiving Holy Communion.

This has been the teaching of the Church since apostolic times. ²⁷² In the past, many interpreted this to mean that they should receive Communion rarely, or not at all. This was partly due to an exaggerated sense of unworthiness, but it was also a problem caused by spiritual apathy on the part of some. Rather than repent and live the Gospel life, they simply chose to remain in their sin. They came to Mass, perhaps because of family or social expectations, but they did not receive Communion because they knew they were not spiritually ready.

Spiritual apathy is still a problem today, a lack of real interest in living the life of the Gospel. Yet nearly everyone receives Holy Communion, even though they rarely, if ever, receive sacramental absolution and reconciliation with the Church. This is not spiritually helpful to them.

The Church does not teach that only the perfect may share in the Eucharist; no one of us is yet perfected. But some may ignore the need for spiritual discernment that St Paul says is necessary if we are going to receive worthily and avail ourselves of the grace offered in the Eucharist. The first step on the road to recovery from spiritual blindness is an admission of our own need for change:

There are two ways of coming to God: through the preservation of innocence, and through the loss of it.

Some have come to God because they were good, like Mary, who was "full of grace"; like Joseph, the "just man"; like Nathaniel, "in whom there was no guile"; or like John the Baptist, "the greatest man ever born of woman".

But others have come to God who were bad, like the young Gerasene man "possessed of devils"; like Magdalen, out of whose corrupt soul the Lord had cast seven devils; and like the thief who spoke to Jesus at the Crucifixion.

The world loves the mediocre. The world hates the very good and the very bad. The good are a reproach to the mediocre, and the evil are a disturbance." ²⁷³

Sinners who came to Jesus recognised their need to change, and change they did. Before Holy Communion, we repeat the words of the Roman centurion who was aware of his own unworthiness. ²⁷⁴ Once he recognised the power of Jesus to heal and to save, Jesus was willing and able to work the wonders of His grace.

Jesus does not exalt the mediocre; on the contrary, He reproves and chastises, calling us to repentance because He loves us. ²⁷⁵ Nor does He force His way into our hearts; He stands at the door and knocks. ²⁷⁶ To open the door to Jesus means acknowledging our need for a Saviour, i.e., admitting our own sinfulness and unworthiness. *Lord, I am not worthy ...*

271 cf Matthew 22:1-14

272 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1385

273 Michael Dubruiel, *Praying in the Presence of Our Lord* with Fulton J Sheen, p 82

274 cf Matthew 8:5-13

275 cf Revelation 3:14-19

276 cf Revelation 3:20

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Priest's Communion (Christ's Body, broken for us)

He lies in the manger, but contains the world.

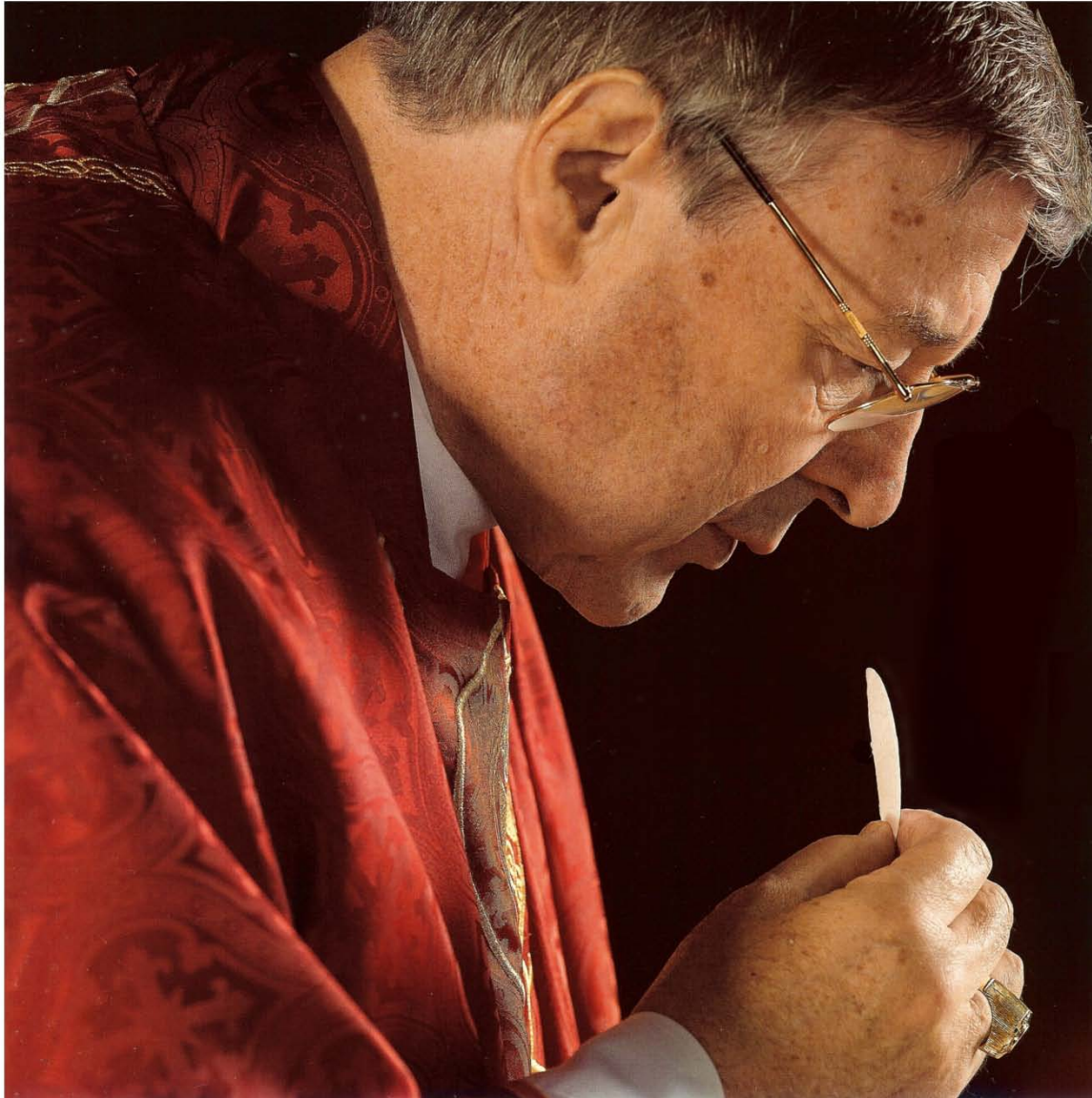
He nurses at the breast, but feeds the angels.

He is wrapped in swaddling clothes, but vests us with immortality.

He found no place in the inn, but makes for Himself a temple in the hearts of believers.

In order that weakness might become strong, Strength became weak.

- Sermon 190.3-4



[58. After this, standing and turned toward the altar, the priest says quietly: *Corpus Christi custodiat me in vitam aeternam* (May the Body of Christ bring me to everlasting life) and reverently receives the Body of Christ.

It may seem strange to some that we should consider the priest's Communion as an action separate from the Communion of the people. That wonderment may arise from a deeper question: what is a priest?

A priest is a man who preaches the Gospel, shepherds the faithful and offers sacrifice to God. ²⁷⁷ Surely, all the baptised - both laity and clergy - participate in the one priesthood of Christ, but each in their own proper way. *While being ordered one to another, they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace - a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit - the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a means by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads His Church.* ²⁷⁸

Priests are human beings with weaknesses; they, like all Christians, can sin. But at the altar, they act in the power and the place of the person of Christ Himself. ²⁷⁹ Priests are not deputies of the local community, but are ministers of Christ and of the entire Church. ²⁸⁰ To them is entrusted the office of presiding over the Eucharistic assembly and of providing the people of God with the Lord's Body and Blood.

The priest is not the 'host' of the Eucharistic Banquet; the One Who invites, prepares and provides is Christ Himself. But because the priest acts *in persona Christi*, he enters into the sacrifice of the Mass in a particularly intimate way. Just as Jesus had to complete His act of self-oblation on the Cross, saying "*It is finished,*" ²⁸¹ so it is required that the priest complete the sacrificial act by himself receiving the Body and Blood of Christ before sharing it with the faithful. *Nemo dat quod non habet.* (No one gives what he himself does not have.) ²⁸²

Just as he prays quietly to prepare himself for Holy Communion, he also prays quietly at the moment of reception, saying: *May the Body of Christ bring me to everlasting life.* This is not a prayer of the assembly, but the priest's private petition to the Lord Jesus, Whose Body he now holds in his hands, present on the altar through the words and actions of the priest. The Child of Bethlehem, the Teacher of the multitudes, the Man of Sorrows, the Risen Lord and Christ - it is He Whom the priest now holds. Jesus is the saving Victim, offered to the Father through the hands of His priest.

It is an intimate moment of communion between disciple and Master. In watching their spiritual father devoutly receive the Lord's Body, the faithful learn how to approach the altar in humility, in adoration, in love.

- 277 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1564
- 278 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1547
- 279 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1548
- 280 cf Catechism of the Catholic Church, no 1553
- 281 John 19:30
- 282 Latin axiom used today in property law

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Priest's Communion (Christ's Blood, shed for us)

*Lord, You gladden my mind with spiritual joy.
How glorious is Your cup, surpassing all previous delights.*

- On Psalm 22:5



158. ...Then (the priest) takes the chalice, saying quietly, *Sanguis Christi custodiat me in vitam aeternam* (May the Blood of Christ bring me to everlasting life), and reverently receives the Blood of Christ.

The bishop then communicates, followed by the priests, the deacons, the subdeacons, the readers, the singers and the monks; then, among the women, the deaconesses, the virgins and the widows; then the children; then the rest of the people, in order, with reverence and devotion, without disturbance. ²⁸³

The Catholic Church is an organised family, a hierarchical community. From its inception, the Church has followed certain ordered patterns of liturgical worship. Its clergy have always received Holy Communion first, never last.

Some would question this pattern, saying that it does not reflect true family life. Surely, parents ensure that their children have their food before taking some for themselves.

But it is important to recall that the Mass is both Banquet and Sacrifice. When the priest distributes Holy Communion to the faithful, he is inviting them to share in the Lord's Banquet. But when he himself receives the Lord's Body and Blood before the faithful, he is demonstrating the enormity of the Sacrifice.

Jesus died for us, to take away our sins. He invites us to join Him, to have a share in His Cross. ²⁸⁴ But He asks nothing of us that He did not Himself do first for our sakes.

Likewise, His priests are called to show us the way, to "*gladly spend and be utterly spent*" ²⁸⁵ for the sake of the flock, as the Master laid down His life for His sheep. ²⁸⁶ At the time of Holy Communion, the priest acts as the officiant of the holy Sacrifice. Like a father who will face difficulties before asking his children to do so, the priest of Jesus Christ partakes of the Chalice, responding to the question, "*Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?*" ²⁸⁷ The spiritual father drinks before asking the children to do the same.

The priest, acting *in persona Christi*, drinks of the Cup first because Christ Himself drank from the Cup first. Then the Cup of suffering becomes the Cup of Blessing: *The Cup of Blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ?* ²⁸⁸

The New Passover, however, is not a commemoration of a tragedy but a celebration of something wonderful, even joyful: *we have redemption through His Blood.* ²⁸⁹ Thus His Cup is glorious, and overflowing with grace and love.

Completing the Sacrifice by feasting on Christ's Body and drinking His Blood, the priest leaves the altar to share this inestimable Gift with the people. He does not tarry, but goes to them immediately. After all, acting in the person of Christ, he said to them in Jesus' own words, "*This is the Cup of My Blood ... it will be shed for you.*" ²⁹⁰

283 The Apostolic Constitutions, VIII, 13, 10-17
284 cf Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 14:27
285 2 Corinthians 12:15
286 cf John 10:11
287 Matthew 20:22
288 1 Corinthians 10:16
289 Ephesians 1:7
290 words from the Consecration of the Chalice

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Communion Procession

*O Sacrament of love! O Sign of our unity!
O Bond of our fraternity! All who long for life
have here its very Source.
Let them come here and believe, unite with You and live!*

On John's Gospel 26:13



86. While the priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion chant is begun. Its purpose is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the 'communitarian' nature of the procession to receive Communion. The singing is continued for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful. If, however, there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion chant should be ended in a timely manner.
160. The priest then takes the paten or ciborium and goes to the communicants who, as a rule, approach in a procession.

As he gives the oblation, the bishop says: "The Body of the Lord." He who receives it is to reply: "Amen." On his part, the deacon takes the cup and says as he gives it: "The Blood of Christ, the Cup of life." He who drinks it is to respond: Amen. While Communion is going on, Psalm 33(34) is chanted. ²⁹¹

The Church has always seen the moment of Holy Communion as a communal action. ²⁹² And at least from the time of St Augustine (354-430), the Church has accompanied this action with the singing of a psalm. A favourite of the first Christians was Psalm 33(34):

*I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips.
In the Lord my soul shall make its boast; the humble shall hear and be glad.*

*Glorify the Lord with me - together let us praise His Name.
I sought the Lord and He answered me; from all my terrors He set me free.*

*Look towards Him and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed.
This poor man called; the Lord heard him and rescued him from all his distress.*

*The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who revere Him, to rescue them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good! He is happy who seeks refuge in Him.*

*Revere the Lord, you His saints. They lack nothing, those who revere Him.
Strong lions suffer want and go hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing.*

This psalm was probably known by heart by early Christians. As other psalms were adopted for use on special occasions, antiphons or short refrains were sung by the assembly while cantors sang the psalm verses. For this psalm, a popular antiphon was simply the words *Taste and see that the Lord is good!* We have preserved these refrains in the Entrance and Communion Antiphons that are found in the Roman Missal. The Church encourages the faithful to sing psalms with their antiphons during the Communion Procession, continuing the ancient tradition.

The Communion Procession is communal movement. We do not come to the altar one at a time, but together, as one body. This procession is enabled and enhanced by communal singing. Some people prefer to look upon Holy Communion solely as a private, personal encounter with Christ. Certainly, some quiet moments should be provided for the individual's quiet reflection later, in the moment of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion. But St Augustine writes that *receiving the Eucharist does not so much mean that we partake of the divine life offered us, as that the divine life draws us unto itself ...* ²⁹³ And Christ came to draw us together as one body, in a "bond of fraternity." A mystery of divine-human love and communion is fashioned in the Eucharistic celebration, and it is realised in all its fullness at the altar. It is called a Holy Communion, not only because we become one with Christ, but also because of our communion with one another: *"Now you are Christ's Body, and individually parts of It."* ²⁹⁴

- 291 The Apostolic Constitutions, loc cit
- 292 cf Acts of the Apostles 2:46
- 293 St Augustine; cf Sermon 272, Tractate on John, 21; Confessions
Book VII
- 294 1 Corinthians 12:27

THE COMMUNION RITE: The People's Communion (Sharing in Christ's Sacrifice)



Every believer, before tasting other food, is to take care to receive the Eucharist ... Everyone is to take care that no unbeliever, no mouse or other animal eats of the Eucharist, and that no particle of the Eucharist falls on the ground or is lost. For it is the Body of the Lord that the faithful eat, and It is not to be treated carelessly. ²⁹⁵

Early Christians were clear: the Eucharist is not a symbol nor a reminder, but the true Body and Blood of Christ. The many accounts of Christian men and women who risked life and limb in order to share in the Eucharist speak more eloquently than any philosophical words could.

For we do not take this Food as though it were ordinary bread and wine. But, just as the Word of God, Jesus Christ, became incarnate, took flesh and blood for our salvation, in the same way this Food, which has become Eucharist thanks to the prayer formed out of the words of Christ, and which nourishes and is assimilated into our flesh and blood, is the Flesh and Blood of the incarnate Jesus: this is the doctrine that we have received. ²⁹⁶

St Cyril of Jerusalem describes how Christians of his time were to receive the Body of Christ: *In approaching, do not come forward with your wrists apart or your fingers spread, but make your left hand a throne for the right, since you are receiving into it a King, and cup your hand and receive the Body of Christ and say, "Amen". Then partake, ... being careful lest you lose anything of It ... Tell me: if someone gave you some grains of gold, would you not hold them with all carefulness, lest you lose some of them and thus suffer a loss? Will you not, then, be much more careful in keeping watch over what is more precious than gold and gems, so that not a particle of It may escape you?* ²⁹⁷

Early Christians received the Eucharist every day, ²⁹⁸ and ensured that those who could not participate would receive their 'daily bread': *The Eucharists are distributed and shared out to everyone, and the deacons are sent to take them to those who are absent.* ²⁹⁹

The words used in administering Holy Communion in the 4th century are those used today: *If you are the Body and members of Christ, then it is your sacrament that is placed on the table of the Lord; it is your sacrament that you receive. To that which you are, you respond, "Amen" - "Yes, it is true!" By responding to it, you assent to it. For you hear the words, "The Body of Christ" and respond "Amen." Be, then, a member of the Body of Christ, that your "Amen" may be true.* ³⁰⁰

During most of the first millennium it was customary to receive Communion under both forms: bread and wine. Pope Gelasius I (d 496) criticised those who did not receive from the Cup: *"They should either receive the Sacrament in Its entirety or be kept from It altogether, since it is impossible to separate one and the same Mystery without severe sacrilege."* Anxiety about the possibility of

spilling, however, led to a change in the form of Communion in the Eastern Churches, where the danger of spilling was avoided by placing the Host in the consecrated Wine and then giving It to the communicant. This was rejected in the West, on the grounds that this was no longer an act of drinking. But this rejection had the consequence that, unlike in the East, the participation of the people in the Cup was entirely abandoned by the 12th-13th centuries.³⁰¹

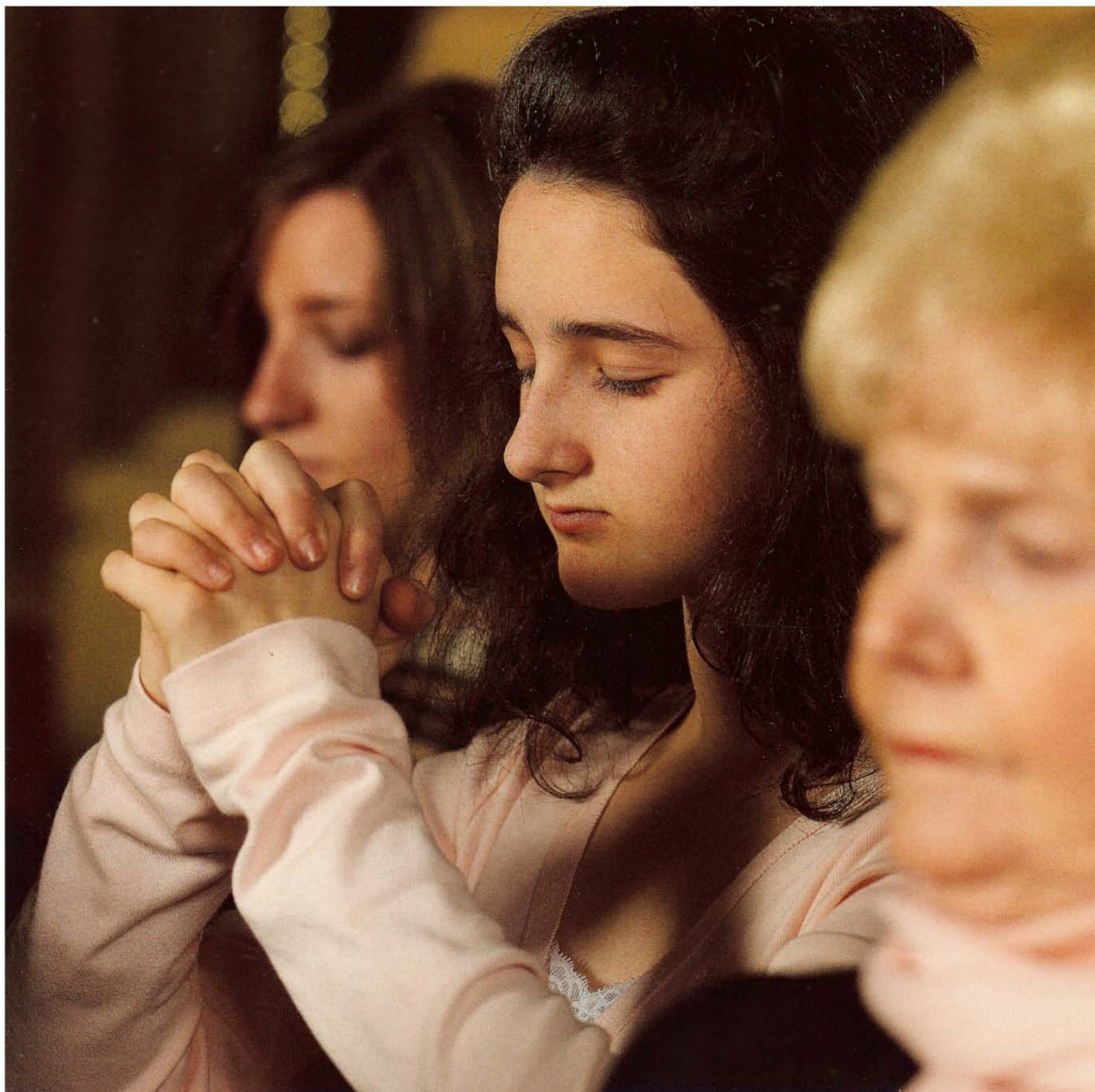
Drawings from about the year 500 depict communicants receiving the Eucharist while standing. The Lectionary of Bernward of Hildesheim (d 1022) is the first witness to reception of Communion while kneeling, an attitude that only slowly penetrated the West between the 11th and 16th centuries. In the Eastern Churches the faithful have always received Communion while standing,³⁰¹ a practice that has returned to the West.

- 295 St Hippolytus. Op cot, 32
- 296 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 65-66
- 297 St Cyril of Jerusalem, op cit
- 298 cf Acts of the Apostles, loc cit
- 299 St Justin Martyr, op cit, 67
- 300 St Augustine, Sermon 272
- 301 cf Bernhard Kleinheyer, op cit, p 95
- 302 op cit, p 90

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Thanksgiving after Holy Communion

*Pray within yourself.
Be yourself a temple of God,
because God in His temple will hear the one who prays.*

- On John's Gospel 15:25



88. When the distribution of Communion is finished, as circumstances suggest, the priest and faithful spend some time praying privately. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the entire congregation.

Ritual prayer takes several forms: speaking, singing ... and silence. Silence can be for listening, or for speaking in the heart. Silence is necessary if our prayer is to be a true communication with God; otherwise, we risk the danger of being lost in many words. God speaks when we are still enough to listen.

The Church encourages silence at this moment of thanksgiving, and at other times during the liturgy: *Sacred silence, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. At the Act of Penitence ... at the Collect ... after the readings and the Homily ... After Communion, the faithful praise and pray to God in their hearts. Even before the celebration itself, it is commendable that silence be observed in the church, in the sacristy, in the vesting room, and in adjacent areas, so that all may dispose themselves to carry out the sacred action in a devout and fitting manner.* ³⁰³

Private prayer after Holy Communion has long been a recommended practice. St Alphonsus Ligouri urged at least a half hour of prayer after the reception of the Eucharist. ³⁰⁴ Pope Pius XII strongly recommended that *"priest and faithful ... converse with the Divine Redeemer for at least a short while after Holy Communion."* ³⁰⁵ Canon Law cautions priests not to forget to make a proper thanksgiving after Mass, ³⁰⁶ and the Roman Missal includes various prayers to nourish the priest's devotion, both before and after Mass. Some of these prayers are also appropriate for the laity, e.g. *the Anima Christi* (Soul of Christ), St Ignatius Loyola's Prayer of Self-Dedication ("Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty"), and the *En Ego* (Prayer before the Crucifix).

Due to the infrequency of their reception of the Eucharist in past generations, many laity developed the habit of exiting Mass as the priest received Holy Communion. This habit still has an influence today, with some people leaving Mass early, even if they themselves have partaken of the Eucharist. It is incumbent, then, on priests to help their people develop a love for the prayer of silence:

We must try to rediscover something of what is called the contemplative attitude, actually experiencing it ourselves, not just talking about it interestingly. All around us we see activity ... but what directs it? An inwardness no longer really at home within itself which thinks, judges, acts from the surface ... An 'interiority' too superficial to contact the truth lying at life's centre, which no longer reaches the essential and everlasting ... ³⁰⁷

Historically, there are only isolated instances in the Roman rite of a hymn being sung after Holy Communion. It has become a widespread custom in recent years. Nevertheless, adequate time for silent prayer should not be rare. Such silence is important to the total rhythm of the celebration; it is important, too, for the spiritual development of the Christian soul. Catherine de Hueck Doherty wrote:

From within your heart and soul (the Trinity) will breathe forth the infinite power which is God's life. But for this to happen, the soul must be totally pure and ready to accept the loneliness of silence ... Silence is a dark night where soul and mind abide to wait for light that is God's speech. Silence is the key to the immense furnace of Love - the heart of God. Silence is the speech of passionate love spent in the arms of God. Silence is oneness with the Lord. ³⁰⁸

That is the essence of Holy Communion: oneness with the Lord.

303 GIRM, no. 45

304 St Alphonsus Liguori, *The Holy Eucharist*; 1745

305 Pope Pius XII, *Encyclical Letter Mystici Corporis*; 1943

306 *Code of Canon Law*, 909

307 Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility*, pp 92-104; 1951

308 Catherine deHueck Doherty, *Molchanie: The Silence of God*, p 13

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Purification of the Holy Vessels

What Christian is unaware of the words of the most blessed Sixtus, bishop of Rome and martyr of Christ, who said: "A pure mind is a holy temple for God, and a heart clean and without sin is His best altar"? You know that the clean heart must be brought to this perfection, whilst "the inward man is renewed day by day," (2 Cor 4:16) yet not without the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- Anti-Pelagian Writings: On St Sixtus



163. When the distribution of Communion is finished, the priest himself immediately and completely consumes at the altar any consecrated Wine that happens to remain; as for any consecrated Hosts that are left, he either consumes them at the altar or carries them to the place designated for the reservation of the Eucharist. Upon returning to the altar, the priest collects any fragments that may remain. Then, standing at the altar or at the credence table, he purifies the paten or ciborium over the chalice, then purifies the chalice, saying quietly: *Quod ore sumpsimus (Lord, may I receive)*, and dries the chalice with a purificator. If the vessels are purified at the altar, they are carried to the credence table by a minister. Nevertheless, it is also permitted, especially if there are several vessels to be purified, to leave them suitably covered on a corporal, either at the altar or at the credence table, and to purify them immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people.

The purification of the sacred vessels is a functional task, similar to the necessary tasks of clearing the table and washing the dishes after a family meal.

However, the performance of these functional tasks at home can be opportunities for family members to communicate with one another and extend the conversation begun at table. Similarly, this moment of the Mass is a time for all of us, priest and people, to continue our prayerful communion with the Lord.

At the Preparation of the Gifts, the functional tasks of setting the altar with all the things necessary for the Eucharistic Sacrifice are clothed with prayer, gesture and even song. Similarly, the purification of the vessels has its own prayer that is said by the priest: *Lord, may I receive these gifts in purity of heart. May they bring me healing and strength, both now and for ever.*³⁰⁹ This indicates that the time of the purification of the vessels is not merely functional, but a time of prayerful reflection. Sometimes a post-Communion hymn of thanksgiving, or a quiet musical interlude, begins at this time; otherwise a brief period of silence enables everyone to pray quietly.

The oldest known form of purification after Holy Communion was the ablution of the mouth. St John Chrysostom (345-407) directed his priests to take a little water or eat a piece of bread so that none of the Sacred Species would remain in the mouth. Later, a sip of wine was used for this purpose.

Linked to the ablution of the mouth was the washing of the chalice and the purification of the priest's fingers. These actions were at first done in silence, but soon a number of prayers were added to foster the devotion of the priest. The 1570 Missal of Pope St Pius V codified the ritual actions and prayers for this part of the Mass.

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Prayer after Communion

*Praise and thanksgiving are offered to God,
by Whose grace you are what you are.*

- Letter 27 (to Paulinus) 27



89. To bring to completion the prayer of the People of God, and also to conclude the entire Communion Rite, the priest sings or says the Prayer after Communion, in which he prays for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated.

After you have eaten your fill, give thanks like this: We give You thanks, O holy Father, for Your Holy Name which You have made to dwell in our hearts, for the knowledge, faith and immortality that You have revealed to us through Jesus, Your Child. Glory to You for ever! It is You, almighty Master, Who has created the world, that Your Name may be praised; for their enjoyment You have given food and drink to the children of men; but us You have graciously favoured with a spiritual Food and with a Drink that gives eternal life, through Jesus Your Child. Above all, we give You thanks for Your own great power. Glory to You for ever! Amen. ³¹⁰

The Prayer after Holy Communion is an opportunity to ask for the spiritual effects or fruits of the Eucharist. Following the silence (and song) of the period of thanksgiving, it brings the Communion Rite to a prayerful close.

Although prayers for use after Holy Communion did not appear in official liturgical texts until the 5th century, earlier documents give evidence of post-Communion prayers, such as this one:

Let the bishop say: Almighty God, Father of the Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for having granted us to receive Your holy Mystery. Let it not be a cause for us of fault or of condemnation, but let it renew soul, body and spirit, through Your only Son. Through Him, glory to You and power, with Him and the Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever. And let the people reply: Amen. ³¹¹

Parish announcements, fundraising talks and other such business are not a part of the Communion Rite, but may follow the Prayer after Holy Communion.

310 Didache

311 St Hippolytus, op cit, 45-46

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Announcements (We are family)

There is a City, whose citizens we are, insofar as we are Christians.

*St Paul addresses the citizens, saying: "You are no longer aliens or foreign visitors;
you are citizens like all the saints, and part of God's household.*

You are part of a building what has the apostles and prophets for its foundations." (Eph 2:19-20)

You can see the structure of this great City, but do you see where that edifice stands firm, that it may never fall?

"Christ Jesus Himself," says Paul, "is its main cornerstone."

On Psalm 87:1-2



It has been mentioned already that some people continue the habit of leaving Mass early, a habit developed during the centuries when many lay people refrained from receiving Holy Communion. There are those, however, who make their exit early because they have little or no connection with the parish community and thus feel no need to listen to announcements about activities that serve to build up the life of the local community.

The great liturgist Father Romano Guardini again reminds us that *it is the task of the individual to apprehend clearly the ideal world of the liturgy. Individuals must ... go beyond their little personal aims and adopt the educative purpose of the great fellowship of the liturgy. It goes without saying, therefore, that they are obliged to take part in exercises which do not correspond to the particular need of which they are conscious; they must espouse ... causes which do not affect them personally, and which merely arise out of the needs of the community at large; they must at times ... take part in proceedings of which they do not entirely, if at all, understand the significance. All this is particularly difficult for modern people, who find it so hard to renounce their independence ... The problem of fellowship ... lies in their being required to divide their existence with other people ... and to know that they are united with these others in a higher unity.*³¹²

The giving of announcements has always been a part of normal liturgical life in the Roman rite. In late 7th-century papal liturgies, the archdeacon would announce the time and place of the next papal Mass. He would do so immediately after the pope's Communion, probably due to the non-communicants who left at this time.

Pope St Leo the Great (r 440-461) reminded the faithful of the fast days for the coming week at the end of his homilies, and would invite them to attend the Saturday evening vigil (First Vespers) for the coming Sunday. This custom of joining parish announcements to the Homily was widespread until recently.

The Roman Missal directs that announcements be made after the Prayer after Communion, and not before. It also requires that such announcements be made from a place other than the ambo: *From the ambo only the readings, the responsorial Psalm, and the Exsultet (Easter Proclamation) are to be proclaimed; it may be used also for giving the Homily and for announcing the intentions of the Prayer of the Faithful. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the Word should go up to it.*³¹³

90. The Concluding Rites include brief announcements, if they are necessary.

312 Romano Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, pp 141-149

313 GIRN, no. 309

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Blessing

*Let our soul bless the Lord,
and let God bless us.
For when God blesses us, we grow,
and when we bless the Lord, we grow.
Both are profitable to us.*

- On Psalm 67:1



The Lenten season in the Patristic Era was a not only a time for catechumens to make final preparation for the Sacraments of Initiation. Penitents were also preparing to end their period of exclusion (self-imposed or Church-imposed) from Holy Communion. At Rome, it was customary for the deacon to invite these non-communicants, as well as the rest of the faithful who were spending the forty days of Lent in penance and prayer, to bow down and receive a blessing from the bishop.

This "Prayer over the People" was the origin of the Blessing given at the conclusion of the Mass of the Roman rite. However, earlier ancient liturgies included post-Communion blessings such as this one: *When they have communicated, let the priest lay his hands on them and say: Ever-living, almighty God, Father of the Lord and our Saviour Jesus Christ, bless thy servants, men and women. Protect them, uphold them, content them by the power of Your archangel. Guard them, strengthen in them awe in the presence of Your majesty. Give them peace without fear or anxiety, through Your only Son. Through Him, glory to You and power, with Him and the Holy Spirit, now and always and for ever. Let the people reply: Amen.* ³¹⁴

From at least the 7th century on, the pope silently blessed the assembly as he processed out of the church after the Dismissal. Other bishops adopted this custom. Finally, priests began giving a simple blessing from the altar. Formulas of blessing appeared in the 13th century, with the present text being codified in the 1570 Roman Missal of Pope St Pius V.

To bless God means to praise Him for His goodness and gifts. To bless a person is to ask God to extend His generosity. In the Blessing at the end of Mass, the priest, acting *in persona Christi*, imitates the action of the Lord Jesus Who, before being taken up into Heaven, *"raised His hands, and blessed them* (His disciples)." ³¹⁵

He alone can bless that has the power. He alone is able to bless who is able to create. God alone can bless ... Blessing is the word of power of the Master of creation. It is the promise and assurance of the Lord of Providence. Blessing bestows a happy destiny ... God has imparted a portion of His power to bless to those whose vocation it is to create life. Parents possess this power: "The blessing of the father establishes the houses of the children." Priests possess it, for as parents engender natural life, so the priest begets the supernatural life of grace. To give life is the nature and office of both ... But the power to bless is always and only from God ... The power of divine blessings is merely lent to those who stand in God's stead. Fathers and mothers have it by the sacrament of Christian marriage. The priest has it by the sacrament of ordination ... To each of these the power of blessing is given with such difference as the nature of their apostleship determines. The visible representation of blessing is the hand. By its position and action it indicates the purpose of the blessing ... The hand, as it is the instrument of making and shaping, is also the instrument of spending and giving. ³¹⁶

The priest's anointed hand is raised over the assembly, and then traces over it the Sign of the *Cross in order that the fullness of God's life may flow into the soul and fructify and sanctify us wholly.* ³¹⁷

167. Then the priest, extending his hands, greets the people, saying: *Dominus vobiscum* (The Lord be with you). They answer: *Et cum spiritu tuo* (And with your spirit). The priest, joining his hands again and then immediately placing his left hand on his breast, raises his right hand and adds: *Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus* (May Almighty God bless you) and, as he makes the Sign of the Cross over the people, continues: *Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus* (the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit). All answer: *Amen*. On certain days and occasions this blessing, in accordance with the rubrics, is expanded and expressed by a Prayer over the People or another more solemn formula. A Bishop blesses the people with the appropriate formula, making the Sign of the Cross three times over the people.

314 St Hippolytus, op cit, 46

315 Luke 24:50

316 Romano Guardini, Sacred Signs, pp 81-84

317 loc cit, p 14

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Dismissal

*We go now,
because we go upwards to the peace of the heavenly Jerusalem;
God's good pleasure has set us on that path,
so that we may desire nothing else than to dwell there for ever.*

— Confessions 9



Let the bishop say: The Lord be with you. And let the people reply: And with your spirit. Let the deacon say: Go in peace. With that, the sacrifice is ended. ³¹⁸

Nearly every traditional liturgy of ancient times includes a formal dismissal of the assembly. Among the Franks (people living in what is now approximately France and Germany), the words were "Let us bless the Lord." This became the accepted formula for Masses celebrated during penitential seasons, or when Mass was followed by another liturgical rite such as a procession.

At Rome, the traditional form was "*Ite, missa est*," - "Go, it is the dismissal." The Latin word *missa* means 'sending', and from it we derive English words like 'missile', 'missive', 'permission', 'dismiss', and 'mission'. It is this last meaning that can best be applied to the Mass.

"*Ite, missa est*" can also be translated as "Go, it is sent." What is sent? The Word that we have received into our hearts. It is now our mission to utilise the prophetic call we have all been given in Baptism, proclaiming the Lordship of Jesus to those who most need to hear His Good News. We do this by the words we speak and the example we set, allowing Christ to speak through us. "*You may be the only Gospel your neighbour ever hears.*" ³¹⁹

"Go, it is sent." What else is sent? The Body and Blood of Christ that we have assimilated into our own flesh and blood through our reception of Holy Communion. As members of His Mystical Body, the Church, we become His loving and healing presence for those we encounter: the poor, the sick, the neglected elderly. Some of us are called to reach out to prisoners, those enslaved by addictions, or those labouring under physical or psychological disabilities. Others of us are sent to people marginalised by society: the homeless, the unemployed, the young who feel hopeless. ³²⁰

Pope John Paul said, "*The Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door.*" ³²¹ All of us, young and old, are sent into the world to evangelise, to announce the Gospel to someone, somewhere.

Before He was taken up into Heaven, Jesus said to His disciples, and He says to us today: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold: I am with you always, even to the end of time.*" ³²² *Jesus Himself, through His disciples, sent forth from east to west the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation. Amen.* ³²³

318 St Hippolytus, op cit

319 Michel Quoist, Prayers

320 cf Pope John Paul II, Message to the People of Spain on the occasion of the 45th Eucharistic Congress in Seville, 5 June 1994

321 Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Dies Domini*

322 Matthew 28:19-20

323 Mark 16, 'the shorter ending'

THE COMMUNION RITE: The Recessional

*Now, my brothers and sisters, let us sing!
As pilgrims on the way, sing in hope — but keep on marching.
Are we making progress in good works, in true faith, in right living?
Then we are on the right way — but don't rest in order to sing.
No, sing and march in the hope of eternal rest.*

- Sermon 256:3



169. Then, as a rule, the priest venerates the altar with a kiss and, after making a genuflection with the lay ministers, departs with them.

At the beginning of the Mass, the altar is kissed in a gesture of greeting. At the conclusion, the altar is again kissed, but this time in an act of farewell.

In earlier times, the priest kissed the altar before imparting the Blessing, as if to receive the blessing from Christ before sharing it with the assembly. But the liturgy of that time reversed the order of the Blessing and Dismissal, and the priest kissed the altar again before announcing the Dismissal. Today's liturgy more logically makes the Dismissal follow the Blessing, with the kissing of the altar after the Dismissal to make its valedictory character clear.

This farewell kiss looks back to the Eucharist which has concluded, and reminds all present that Christ, the foundation stone of the Church, must be the foundation of all we say and do now, as we bring His message to a waiting world.

The official texts make no mention of a Recessional Song. Medieval books often contained various texts to accompany the departure of the priest, *e.g.* Daniel 3:57-88, Psalm 150, or the Prologue of St John's Gospel. This latter text was eventually standardised as the "Last Gospel," and was read at the Gospel side (left hand side, as one looks at the altar from the nave) before the priest left the sanctuary. Since the liturgical renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council, this has been removed from the Mass.

Neither Western nor Eastern liturgies have concluded with singing as a matter of rite. However, to give the celebration a certain sense of conclusion, and to accompany the departure of the clergy and ministers, it has become customary to have a song sung by the choir and/or the assembly.

Some places prefer to have music played on the organ or other instruments to accompany the Recessional. And many places are returning to the custom of silence at the Recessional during Lent, to highlight the return of the organ at Easter.³²⁴

It is wise not to make the Communion Rite and the Concluding Rites disproportionate in terms of music. A Communion Hymn, Post-Communion Hymn of Thanksgiving, and Recessional Hymn are not equally required by the Roman Missal. In fact, only the first of these three is required; the second is permitted, and the third is not even mentioned. It is more important to sing the various acclamations, chants and responses of the Mass, and then allow time for reflection at appropriate moments. *Every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation. In the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, however, preference should be given to those that are of greater*

importance and especially to those to be sung by the priest or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the priest and people together. ³²⁵

If there is to be a Recessional Song, it should be one that relates to the feast or season that is celebrated, or be a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord Who has gathered His people and now sends them to accomplish His mission in the world.

324 GIRM, no.313; cf Musicam Sacram, 1967 Instruction on Sacred Music, nos. 62-77

325 GIRM 40

The Altar



ALTAR

"The altar on which the Sacrifice of the Cross is made present under the sacramental signs is also the table of the Lord to which the People of God is called together to participate in the Mass, as well as the centre of thanksgiving that is accomplished through the Eucharist." - General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 296

The word "altar" refers to an elevated place where sacrifice is offered. The altar is the principal object of liturgical furniture in a church, and ideally has a table of stone and is built free-standing so that the priest may walk around it. See the Chapter "Kissing the Altar" for more consideration of the altar.

AMBO

"The dignity of the word of God requires that the church have a place that is suitable for the proclamation of the word and toward which the attention of the whole congregation of the faithful naturally turns during the Liturgy of the Word". - General Instruction of the Roman Missal n.309

Arrangements for the place of proclaiming the Word during Mass have varied over the centuries, from high stone pulpits to simple moveable lecterns, but the nature of the proclamation of the scripture readings and the homily obviously suggest that *"It is appropriate that this place be ordinarily a stationary ambo and not simply a moveable lectern. The ambo must be located ... in such a way that the ordained ministers and lectors may be clearly seen and heard by the faithful."* - General Instruction of the Roman Missal 309

CHAIR

"The chair for the priest celebrant must signify his office of presiding over the gathering and directing the prayer." - General Instruction of the Roman Missal n. 310

The chair for the celebrating priest is quite distinct from the chair or "cathedra" of the bishop in his cathedral, which is *"the sign of his teaching office and pastoral power in the particular Church (i.e. the diocese), and a sign also of the unity of believers in the faith that the bishop proclaims as shepherd of the Lord's flock."* - Ceremonial of Bishops n.42

TABERNACLE

"... the Most Blessed Sacrament should be reserved in a tabernacle in part of the church that is truly noble, prominent, readily visible, beautifully decorated, and suitable for prayer." – General Instruction of the Roman Missal n.314

The Tabernacle, meaning "tent" or "dwelling place", is a receptacle in which particles of the Blessed Sacrament are kept secure so that Holy Communion may be taken to the sick and dying at any time and so that the faithful may adore Christ who remains truly present in the Eucharistic species. In early centuries the Hosts for Communion of the sick would be kept in a special cupboard in the sanctuary, or later in a receptacle often made in the shape of a dove and suspended over the altar. By the 17th Century the form of Tabernacle with which we are now familiar had come into general use.

Sacred Vessels



THE CIBORIUM



THE PATEN



THE CHALICE

CHALICE

The chalice is the cup into which wine is poured for the celebration of Mass. Chalices may be simple or ornate in design, but must be made of precious material, ordinarily gold or at least gold-plated inside the cup.

PATEN

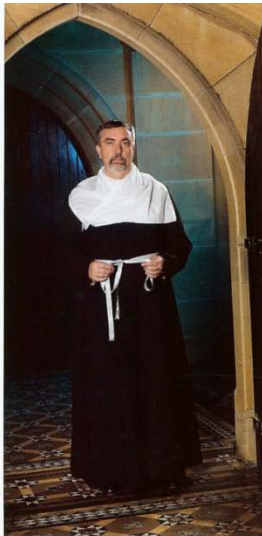
The paten, in its classical form, is a small gold plate on which at least the large altar-bread to be received as Communion by the priest is placed. It may also take a larger, more bowl-like form in order to hold all the breads that will be consecrated for the Communion of the congregation, or these may instead be held in a ciborium.

CIBORIUM

The word "ciborium" refers to a cup with a cover or lid. Often made in a shape similar to a chalice, the ciborium is used to hold the altar breads that are to be

consecrated for the people to receive Holy Communion at Mass, and has a close-fitting lid so that any remaining Hosts can be secure from moisture and vermin when placed in the Tabernacle.

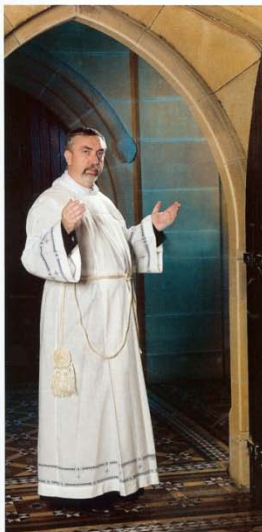
The Vestments of the Priest at Mass



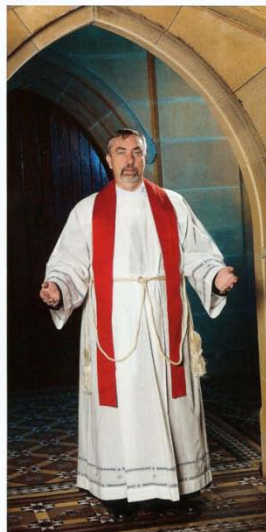
THE AMICE



THE ALB



THE CINCTURE



THE STOLE



THE CHASUBLE

COLOUR OF VESTMENTS

The chasuble and stole, and sometimes the cincture, are made of coloured fabric. The particular colour worn depends on the liturgical season or feast and conveys something of the spirituality of that liturgy. While at different times and in different places the scheme of these liturgical colours has varied, the present arrangement is ordinarily as follows:

WHITE, symbolic of joy: The Easter and Christmas seasons, celebrations of the Lord (other than his Passion), of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Angels, and saints who were not martyrs.

RED, symbolic of blood and of the Holy Spirit: Palm Sunday and Good Friday, Pentecost Sunday, feasts of the apostles and evangelists and of martyred saints.

GREEN, symbolic of hope: During Ordinary Time

VIOLET, symbolic of penance: Advent and Lent, and may be worn at Masses for the Dead

BLACK, symbolic of mourning: Masses for the Dead

ROSE, symbolic of rejoicing: The Third Sunday of Advent and the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the mid-points of the penitential seasons.

"In the Church, which is the Body of Christ, not all members have the same office. This variety of offices in the celebration of the Eucharist is shown outwardly by the diversity of sacred vestments, which should therefore be a sign of the office proper to each minister." - General Instruction of the Roman Missal n. 335.

The vestments worn by the priest for the celebration of Mass have ancient origins. In the first centuries of the Church, the ordinary clothing of the period was worn by the ministers at divine worship, though it is probable they wore the very best available for the celebration of the Eucharist. Over time, however, certain items of clothing came to be associated principally with liturgical functions, and some of the symbolic garments of public office-bearers came into Church use. Bishops, priests and deacons have vestments that are

particular to their office. There is not space here to describe in detail the interesting variety and history of each of the vestments used by the ministers at Mass, so we will refer here to those vestments presently worn by the priest.

AMICE

A rectangular piece of linen with long tapes attached at two corners, the amice was originally a covering for the head and shoulders. Priests who are monks or friars still wear it thus, over the cowl of their habit, when they vest for Mass. Diocesan and other priests no longer use it to cover the head, except briefly when they put it on, but arrange it about the neck.

ALB

The alb is a long loose white tunic, customarily made of linen, which reaches from the shoulders to the ankles. It probably originates in the tunics commonly worn by people in antiquity. It is sometimes decorated on the sleeves and near the hem.

CINCTURE

The cincture is a girdle tied over the alb to gather and hold its folds. It is usually a woven cord with tassels at each end.

The amice, alb, and cincture are common to all the liturgical ministers at Mass, over which bishops, priests and deacons wear the vestments proper to their order. In the case of priests celebrating Mass this means the addition of the following:

STOLE

The stole is a long band of fabric which, for priests, is worn around the neck and hangs down in front.

CHASUBLE

The chasuble is the outer garment which has become characteristic of the priest at Mass and is likewise worn by bishops at the altar. It has its probable origin in the ordinary outer garment of the lower classes in the late Roman Empire. From its original conical shape it has evolved into two main forms: the stiff, rather square and cut-down shape of the Baroque era; and the more ample, flowing vestments illustrated in this book.